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The Winged Whale ; OR, Red Rupert of the Gulf.

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"KENTUCKY SPORT," "OVERLAND KIT," "PRAIRIE
MAZEPPA," "MAN-FROM-TEXAS."

CHAPTER I. THE WATER DEMON.

THE stars twinkled brightly in the dark sky, and were reflected back in little ripples of shining light as they gleamed on the somber waters of Pensacola Bay.
It was about nine o' the night, in the year 1814. A little fishing sloop containing three fishermen had just rounded the southern point of Santa Rosa island, and was beating up the bay toward the city of Pensacola.

One of the fishermen, a little wiry fellow, known as Pablo Domingo, was stretched out at full length in the bow of the "smack," keeping a sharp look-out ahead. The second man was crouched down in the center of the boat, while the third was at the helm.

"Keep her a little to the south'ard, Gomez!" cried the fisherman in the bow to the brawny fellow whose strong hand was on the tiller.

"Ay, ay," he responded.

"Pablo, what story was that that Diego was telling you on the beach, just before we set sail this morning?" asked the man in the center of the boat, who was known by the name of Jose.

"You have sharp ears, Jose," said Pablo.

"Well, from his manner I guessed that he was telling of something worth hearing, and so I listened," replied Jose, honestly.

"And what did you hear?"

"Something about some terrible fright that he had got in the bay."

"Bah!" cried Gomez, with a look of contempt upon his face, "Diego is a coward; why, his own shadow in the moonbeams would cause him to take to his heels."

"He has seen more than a shadow, if he speaks the truth," said Pablo, gravely.

"Well, what has he seen? Come, the story," cried Gomez, impatiently.

"Hast thou never heard the story of the specter that is said to haunt this bay?" asked Pablo, mysteriously.

"What, the spirit of the Indian chief who was killed near yonder headland?" and Gomez pointed to the north as he spoke.

"Yes."

"And has Diego seen the specter?"

"He can not tell exactly what he saw," replied Pablo; "but I'll tell you what he told me. He had left the town in the morning and ran outside of the island to the fishing-grounds, as we have done to-day. Night had set in when he hoisted sail for home. The breeze was light, and when he reached yonder headland—he had run close in to the shore to avoid the set of the tide that was on the ebb—he fancied he saw a light twinkling up the little inlet; the one behind yon headland, that is called Bayou Achee. Curious to learn the reason of the light being there, he turned the prow of his boat toward the inlet. You know the mouth of it is very narrow and fringed with tall timber, although beyond it widens into quite a bay and winds some ten or fifteen miles inland."

"Yes, yes!" cried his companions, who were listening eagerly.

"The night was very dark; Diego could hardly see a boat's length before him. As he entered the narrow passage that leads to the bayou, the dense gloom of the tree-shadows made it seem as if it was sailing on a sea of ink. The breeze died away. Before, behind, and all around him was darkness. Eagerly he looked; the glimmering light had disappeared. Believing that his eyes had deceived him, he put his helm up to return to the bay. As he slowly forged around—for the breeze was so light that it hardly stirred the sail—a strange circle of bluish light danced upon the water within the gloom of the bayou. In the center of the light appeared the outline of a horrible form. Exactly what it was like Diego could not say; for hardly had his eyes rested upon it when a sudden, fitful gust of wind filled his sail, and he glided through the dark passage into the waters of the bay. When he again looked toward the bayou the light had disappeared; he saw nothing but darkness."

"A wonderful story," said Jose, after a moment's silence.

"All a lie!" cried Gomez, quickly; "a more arrant coward than Diego never existed. I'll bet a bottle of the best wine in yonder town that he saw neither light nor demon form—that he never was within the shadows of yonder inlet!"

"Tush, Gomez!" exclaimed Pablo; "be reasonable. Why should he lie about the matter?"

"So that he may persuade good men that his blood has some fire in it. I'll wager that if we sail into yon dark passage, no mystic light will stop our way."

Jose made the sign of the cross in fright.

"The saints protect us, Gomez! what should put such a thought into your head? Would you brave the power of the Evil One?"

"I'm a good Catholic, and I do not fear Satan himself!" replied Gomez, stoutly. "So, comrades, if your hearts are as firm as mine, I'll turn the bow of our boat toward Bayou

Achee, and we'll see if we can not make something out of this mysterious light and demon form."

"Suppose that the specter should draw our boat into some terrible whirlpool?" suggested Jose.

"I fear not; what have we done that we should come to harm?" demanded Gomez.

"I, for one, fear not," said Pablo.

"Good!" exclaimed Gomez; "shall we go, then?"

"But the specter—"

"Jose, thou art as big a coward as Diego!" cried Gomez, impatiently. "We will see no specter. 'Twas a will-o'-the-wisp dancing in the shadows of the trees that dazzled Diego's eyes. Come, shall we for the inlet?"

"Hold your course as you will, but if the specter sinks our boat, remember that I warned you," said Jose, who had no stomach for the adventure.

With a turn of his wrist, Gomez put the helm up, and the little craft, obedient to her master's will, bore toward the inlet.

"We'll get out the sweeps as we pass the headland, for the wind is from the shore, and we'll need them. We can pull in slowly, and if we discover any thing suspicious, why, we can return," Gomez said.

"Diego swore that he spoke naught but the truth," Pablo observed.

"It may be that there are some Indians encamped on the shores of the bayou," Gomez remarked. "If we are to encounter mortals, I fear not. My musket here," and he touched it with his foot as he spoke—it was in the bottom of the boat—"will protect us. It is loaded with a good ounce ball."

"But if it is the specter of the Indian chief?"

"Then a good round prayer or two will scare him off," Gomez replied.

Quickly the light boat cut her way through the sullen waters.

The night was very dark; the moon had not yet risen and the stars alone shed their rays on sea and land.

Closer and closer came the boat to the dark headland, crowned with cypress trees, that, like a storm-beaten castle, guarded the entrance to Bayou Achee.

The fishermen passed from the open waters of the bay into the narrow channel that led to the land-locked bay.

The shadows of the trees fell thick and heavy around the little boat that danced so lightly upon the surface of the tide.

No sound broke the funereal silence of the night except the idle flapping of the sails against the mast.

Within the sheltered inlet the boat no longer glided swiftly on; the winds that had filled her canvas lulled. A dead calm was around and about them.

The very air seemed heavy and thick.

In spite of his courage, Gomez shuddered when the gloomy shadows that guarded the entrance to the bayou fell upon him.

The boat lost its headway and remained almost motionless upon the bosom of the dark waters.

With straining eyes the fishermen gazed upon the gloom that covered the surface of the bay and then rose upward like a dark wall till it met the stars of heaven.

They saw no light or sign of life within the bayou.

"Get out the sweeps," said Gomez, softly.

The dread influence of the hour and place had its effect upon the spirit of the fisherman.

Slowly and softly the oars descended into the water.

The fishermen pulled as though they feared at each stroke to wake the specters of the lonely water covert.

The little craft felt the power of the strong arms and she glided slowly on, the dark waters rippling with a low and mournful song from her sharp bows.

A dozen times had the long oars dipped into the murky tide; a dozen times had the drops of water—like long strings of ebon pearls, the prizes of Orient climes—fallen from the polished blades and returned to the bosom from whence they sprung, when a sudden start and a muffled cry of Gomez held the fishermen, like statues, to their seats.

Dark as was the night, yet they could see that the face of stout-hearted Gomez was pale with terror. His eyes were fixed upon the darkness before him, and were staring with a stony glare.

For a moment the two looked upon the face of their comrade in amazement not unmixed with horror.

"Look!" Gomez said, in low, earnest tones, and with his finger he pointed over the bow of the boat.

Slowly the two turned their heads. They guessed from the expression upon their comrade's face that they were about to behold a startling sight.

Afar off, on the dark surface of the water gleamed a circle of strange, bluish light.

It was, apparently, some twenty feet in diameter.

The gleaming circle made the surrounding darkness ten times more intense by the contrast.

Then, to their horror, they saw that the strange light was advancing toward them.

With staring eyes they gazed upon the mystic light, fear tugging with giant force at their heart-strings.

And as they looked upon the circle, they saw a dark form advancing in its center!

The form seemed to rise from the waters of the bayou.

It was like the head of a huge fish, and from the shoulders extended gigantic wings.

Its eyes were eyes of fire, that shed a lurid glare upon the darkness of the night; they seemed like red coals.

"The Virgin save us!" cried Gomez, in low tones of horror; "see you the horrible figure?"

"It is a demon!" muttered Pablo, as, with eye fixed with terror, he gazed upon the awful form.

Jose could not speak, but strove to pray to the saints to save him from the evil thing that had risen from the dark waters.

"It seems like a whale!" muttered Gomez, breathlessly. "I have sailed in northern seas, where the storm-king rages amid the icebergs; there I have seen the sea-monster, but this terrible thing has a different kind of head, and wings; a winged whale my eyes never saw before."

"It is no living thing; it is a demon! look at its eyes of fire!" gasped Pablo, in fright.

Then suddenly, the huge mouth of the beast or demon—whatever it was—opened, and a broad sheet of flame burst out upon the air. For a moment it lighted up the little bay and then all was darkness.

The circle of blue light and the terrible monster, that was like unto a winged whale, both had vanished.

Like men awakened from a terrible spell, the fishermen bent to their oars, and paused not till their little boat floated on the waters of the bay.

CHAPTER II.

THE RECOGNITION.

WHILE the fishermen were flying from the terrible form which they had conjured from the dark waters, all the beauty and fashion of the city of Pensacola had gathered in the spacious barrack of the fort, that had, for the nonce, been turned into a ball-room.

The rude walls of the shed—for it was little more—were decorated with the flags of the regiment—the ball was given by the officers of the troops that garrisoned the fort—and green boughs.

Long taper candles, almost countless in number, placed wherever they could gain vantage ground, lighted up the scene.

The gay uniforms of the soldiers, and the bright-colored silk and satin dresses of the ladies, mingled with the plain coats of the civilians.

It was the grandest ball that Pensacola had ever seen.

In a corner of the room stood two men conversing. Their dress told that they were Spanish officers; the wonderful likeness between them—though one was old and the other young—said that they were kindred in blood.

The elder of the two was a man, probably, of fifty years, tall in stature, muscular in build, and with the firm carriage of the head and shoulders that told of years of military life. His face was a strange one; hair, iron-gray in hue and waving in crispy curls, clustered over a high forehead, that was tanned almost to the hue of the Indian; his eyes were jet-black and as keen as the orbs of a hawk; his nose was curved like the beak of a bird of prey, and his massive chin, hid by a full beard, iron-gray in color like his hair, told of a firm will.

Such was the person of Don Carlos Alvarado, the commandante of Pensacola. The city at the time we write of belonged to Spain and was garrisoned by Spanish troops.

His son, Estevan, was strikingly like his father in appearance. His hair and eyes were black, his form slender and graceful, not cast in the rougher mold of his sire.

Estevan Alvarado held the commission of captain in the Spanish service.

"The old barrack is ringing with many a merry step to-night," said the commandante, gazing, a pleasant smile upon his face, on the joyous throng.

"Yes," replied Estevan, shortly, a moody look upon his handsome features.

The intonation of the word was caught by the quick ear of the commandante.

He turned his eyes upon his son's face for a moment.

"What's the matter, Estevan?" he asked, quietly.

"Matter, father?"

"Yes; something is the matter with you," replied the commandante, in his quiet way. "Come, tell me what it is. I have noticed that a cloud has been upon your face ever since the ball commenced. You have not yet danced."

"No, nor do I intend to," said Estevan, biting his lip as he spoke.

"And why?"

"Because there is only one woman in this room that I care to dance with."

"That is no reason why you should not dance at all unless, indeed, the lady be engaged for the whole evening."

"That is the reason exactly," said Estevan, with a bitter laugh; "now can you guess who the lady is?"

"I have only to follow the direction of your eyes and they lead me to her," replied the commandante, with a dry intonation in his voice.

"And you see?"

"Isabel Morena, my ward," said the commandante.

"And my promised wife!" cried Estevan, bitterly; "and yet, to-night, when I sought her hand for the dance, she said in her cold, icy way that she was engaged for the whole of the evening."

"And you?"

"Bowed and left her. The hot passion was swelling in every vein; had I remained by her side, I might have spoken words that afterward I should have regretted."

"Estevan, my son," said the commandante, gently, "you are not proceeding in the right way to gain the love of Isabel. She is a woman—must be humored, flattered. She is beautiful, rich, a gentle and loving girl. She is worth the winning, and yet, like a rash, headstrong boy, you expect the prize to be cast at your feet without an effort on your part to secure it. You know as well as I, that Isabel does not love you; she has given her promise to become your wife simply because I desired her to do so. The pledge is but an act of obedience, not of love. But as yet, she is heart free. She has never seen the man whom every pulse of her being pronounced to be her master. Why should you not win her love? You are young, a dashing soldier of tried courage, and, above all, you have her promise to be your wife. Tush!" cried the father, impatiently; "at thy age, boy, when passion's fires ran riot in my heart, and the blood leaped lightly in my veins, the woman that I loved—as you love this one—I would have won from a thousand rivals."

"But she does not love me."

"And she does not love anybody else; therefore thy chance is good."

"But to see her surrounded by this throng, all worshipers at the shrine of her beauty, cuts me to the heart!" exclaimed Estevan, passionately.

"The ice that you complain of seemingly freezes you alone," said the commandante, quietly; "but who are yonder strangers? their faces are new to me."

Estevan looked in the direction indicated by his father.

He beheld two young men with bronzed faces and a sailor-like air.

"Two friends of Senor Garcia, the merchant," Estevan replied.

"What a strange face the shorter of the two has; the sun has bronzed it almost to the color of the Indian."

"They are two Americans from New Orleans. I heard Garcia speak of them to-day," Estevan said.

The eyes of the commandante were fixed searchingly upon the bronzed face of the dark-hued stranger. A puzzled look appeared upon his features. He passed his hand slowly across his forehead, as though by the act he would recall memories of the past.

"His face is very familiar to me," the commandante said.

Estevan looked at his father in wonder. The expression upon his face puzzled him.

"Do you know the American?" he asked.

"Yes and no," the father said, with a moody air; "the face is not strange to me, and yet I do not think that I ever looked upon it before. It recalls bitter memories of years

long gone; hours of danger and of suffering rise before me from the dim vista of the past. It cannot be possible that this stranger figured in the scenes that occurred long ago, for he is young; but his face stirs up strange recollections."

"If I remember right, Garcia said that it was the American's first visit to our city."

"I am a fool to let his face affect me so. It is but a fancy, nothing more," the commandante said, striving to cast aside the gloomy thoughts that had so suddenly oppressed him.

Leaving Don Carlos and his son in busy conversation, we will turn our attention to the two strangers—the Americans from New Orleans—who were conversing with the young Spanish merchant, Don Garcia.

The taller of the two was a stalwart but ungainly-built Yankee from the town of Salem, Massachusetts—a broad-shouldered, powerful-limbed man, with a face as hard, angular and weather-beaten as though it had been cut out of a pine stump. His sandy hair was cut quite short, except where two long locks curled down in front of his ears. The shrewd gray eyes twinkled with a cunning expression above the high cheek-bones. Decius Andrews—so he was called—was not a handsome man, but honesty and truth were plainly written in every line of his rugged features. In years, he had probably seen thirty-five; and for his occupation, a glance at his storm-tanned features and his rolling gait would have easily told that he was a sailor; one who snatched his fortune from the heaving billows and the roaring gale.

His companion was a man of thirty, not quite so tall as Andrews, but superbly formed. Strength and grace were in every limb; the power of a giant, the suppleness of a snake, combined. The muscles of his body—now hid by the garb of civilization—the victor of the Grecian Games might have envied. The exquisite cast of his head and neck would have shamed the fabled beauty of Apollo. Hair, black as the raven's wing, curled in tangled masses about his temples, and strayed, carelessly, down his neck, meeting the broad white collar. His eyes were black, large and piercing, full of fire, yet at times soft in their lustrous tenderness. His forehead was high and broad, his nose straight, the chin square and firm, and the full mouth, which betrayed just a hint of sensual fire, told of an indomitable will. The face of the stranger would have attracted attention in a crowd; the more so that its color was almost as dark as the hue of the red savage. It was plain that it was not the effect of the sun alone that had bronzed his features, for his hands were of the same color, and if we should roll up the coat-sleeve, 'twould be to reveal an arm tinted like the face and hand. The bronzing was Nature's handiwork—not the kiss of sun and wind.

This man was called Rupert Vane.

Vane and Andrews were fast friends.

Garcia, a young Spaniard with dark hair and eyes, and a frank and honest face, was pointing out to the two the notabilities of the ball-room.

Andrews was listening attentively, while Vane, with a listless air, paid but little heed to the gay throng that surrounded him, or to the many glances of wonder or of admiration that his strange face attracted.

"Who's those two chaps yonder, covered all over with gold lace, looking pooty as a butterfly in June?" asked Andrews, indicating the commandante, Don Carlos, and his son Estevan, as he spoke.

"That is the commandante of Pensacola, Don Carlos Alvarado, and his son, Captain Estevan," Garcia replied.

Carelessly Vane turned his head, and his glance fell upon the two. A moment he gazed, a strange expression upon his face.

Both Andrews and Garcia noticed the look of bewilderment.

Mechanically Rupert passed his hand across his brow, pushing back the shining curls that clustered over his bronzed forehead, as though they baffled thought.

"What's the matter, Vane?" asked Andrews, in wonder.

"I do not know," replied the sailor, absently. "The sight of that man's face affects me strangely."

"Do you know the commandante?" Garcia asked.

"No; this is the first time that I have ever looked upon him, and yet his face calls up memories of my childhood, of years long gone by. I cannot understand it."

"Why, you are a North American!" Garcia said.

"Of course; from the good old Plymouth Rock State, where they have the pootiest gals and the biggest pumpkin-

pies of anywhere this side of creation!" Andrews cried, enthusiastically.

"I cannot understand the emotion that comes over me when I look upon that man's face," Vane said, with his eyes still fixed upon the noble face of the aged Spaniard.

"If you don't know him, and hain't never seen him afore, why in thunder should his face trouble you?"

"That I cannot tell; it is a mystery even to me," Vane replied. "His face recalls events that happened when I was but a child. They rise before me as plain as though it was but yesterday they happened. I have not thought of them for years."

"It is very strange," Garcia said.

"Yes, I cannot account for it," Vane replied, with a troubled smile on his dark face.

"The commandante is a worthy gentleman," Garcia observed. "I cannot say as much for his son, Captain Estevan. He is one of the wildest young men in our city; thinks more of the gaming-table and the wine-bottle than he does of anything else. He is to marry that beautiful girl yonder, Senorita Isabel, his father's ward."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MEDAL.

A PECULIAR look appeared on the dark features of Rupert as he heard the name of Isabel, and a quick, passionate flash shot from his dark eyes.

The look was unseen by his companions, who had turned to gaze at the lady.

Andrews could not repress an exclamation of delight as his eyes fell upon the beautiful, childlike face of the girl who bore the name of Isabel Morena, and was the promised wife of Captain Estevan.

"Jerusalem crickets!" Andrews cried, with a low whistle, indicative of great astonishment; "she ain't a woman—she's a pictur'!"

"Yes, she is beautiful," Garcia said, in admiration.

Rupert Vane spoke not, but his eyes kindled; his bronzed cheek burned, and the heart within his breast throbbed quicker as he looked upon the peerless beauty.

In person, Isabel Morena was about the medium hight, of slender build and exquisite form. All the grace of the swaying willow was in every motion. Her complexion was as fair as Parian marble; her tresses gleamed like molten gold in the sunlight; her eyes, a heavenly blue, seemed too pure for one of earthly mold. The face of Isabel Morena was the face of the Madonna; that face of rare beauty that the great masters—the painters whose works will outlive all ages—were so fond of depicting upon their canvas. It was a face to love, to idolize!

It was not strange that the face of the beautiful girl should produce such an effect upon the two Americans.

"What do you think, Rupert?" said Andrews. "Ain't she a leetle ahead of anything this side of sunrise, eh? Oh, doughnuts! she's enough to make a feller speak right out in meetin'!"

"She is a very beautiful girl," Rupert replied, quietly, but there was a sonorous ring in his deep voice that did not escape the quick ear of his friend.

"I'll give you an introduction if you like," said Garcia.

"Like!" cried Andrews, quickly; "I'd walk ten miles through the biggest snow-banks you ever did see for the pleasure of making the acquaintance of such a petticoated angel as this gal is."

"I'll ask her permission to present two of my friends," Garcia said; "there will be no difficulty about it; she is very amiable; as good as she looks."

"She looks sweeter than a bucket of maple-sap!" Andrews exclaimed, earnestly.

Garcia laughed, and leaving the two, proceeded to make his way through the throng to where the beautiful girl stood, surrounded by a little group of admirers.

Andrews watched Rupert for a moment.

The young sailor had his eyes intently fixed upon the face of Isabel. His chest was heaving and his breath came thick and fast. He seemed unconscious to all else but the beautiful face that his eyes were feasting upon.

Andrews touched him lightly on the arm.

Rupert turned with a sudden start. The spell was broken.

"Ain't she a beauty?"

"She is more than that; she is an angel!" Rupert replied.
 "Kinder pilin' it on, ain't yer?" said Andrews, laughing.
 "Did you ever see a more beautiful girl?"
 "Guess I never did. She beats our Salem gals all hollow; and I tell you, New England gals are hard to beat," Andrews replied.

"You are right; on this earth there does not live a more beautiful girl than Isabel Morena!" said Rupert, impulsively.

"Well, now, you are pilin' it on! Struck all of a heap, eh?" Andrews asked, with a grin of good-humor. "Got her name, too, pat; I couldn't say, 'nother flapjack! any easier."

"That is not wonderful. Her name has been ringing in my ears for fifteen years."

"Show!" cried Andrews, in astonishment.

"Yes, for fifteen years, waking or sleeping, her name has been ever with me. The howling wind has borne it to my ears when, on the storm-tossed waters, it has ripped the canvas from the spars. On the white iceberg, gliding, specter-like, by our dancing vessel, in the pale moonlight off stormy Labrador, I have read her name. And then, amid the carnage of the sea-fight, when the round-shot of the foe rattled through our cordage and drenched our decks with blood, I've heard her name whispered in the whistle of the passing ball. I have lived but for one thing, and that is to call you beautiful girl mine, and mine only."

Andrews was thoroughly astonished.

"Sancho! how in thunder did you know anything about this girl?"

"That is a secret that I cannot reveal even to you, old friend," replied Rupert, taking the rough hand of Andrews within his own and pressing it kindly.

"Then you knew that this gal was here afore you come?" Andrews asked, in amazement.

"Yes," Rupert replied; "it is Isabel Morena that has brought Rupert Vane to Pensacola."

"And you're goin' to make love to the gal?"

"Yes."

"Thunder! didn't you hear Don Garcia say that she was going to marry that young son of a sea-cook over there?" Andrews was referring to Estevan.

"Yes, I heard him," Rupert replied, quickly.

"Well, you can't both have her."

"That is true; but, if Isabel loves me, I'll win her in spite of all the Spaniards in Pensacola!"

"Thunder! but do you s'pose you stand any chance to win the gal?"

"If I did not think so, I should not try."

"Well, this beats Sancho!" muttered Andrews, perplexed.

"You have been here before?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, I kinder had a suspicion of it afore, 'cos you knew the lay of the land so well. Why, you took the brigantine into the harbor in the dark almost—for there was precious little moonlight—and never touched rock or shoal. Then the hiding-place that you selected for our craft—why, a feller would almost have to climb over the brigantine afore he could find her. And now that I find that you know this she-angel, I'm nat'rally sure that you ain't a stranger in these parts."

"Perhaps so, and perhaps not," said Rupert, with an evasive smile.

"But, I say!" cried Andrews, suddenly, "this gorgeous chap over there may interfere with your plans. If the girl has promised to marry him, he'll be apt to make some trouble, and as he's the son of the commandante—he's head-cook and bottle-washer round here—you may be worried a leetle."

"If the girl loves me and consents to go with me, I'll have her if I have to run the brigantine up the harbor and risk a fight with the fort. The British cruisers haven't named me Red Rupert for nothing. A hundred brave men follow my lead, Andrews; enough force to lay the city of Pensacola in ashes, if it dispute my passage with the girl I love," said the sailor, in a low tone, but with blazing eyes.

"I shouldn't like anything better than a fight with the dons!" exclaimed Andrews, rubbing his hands in glee.

"I do not expect to win the girl without a struggle," Rupert said, thoughtfully. "But, at present, I have a great advantage. But one person alone will suspect my mission here—that I come to win a bride—and even that person will not guess that a well-armed vessel and a hundred men are at my back."

"But who in thunder will guess the object that brings you here?" asked Andrews, in wonder.

"The woman that I seek!"

"What! the gal, herself, suspect that you are after her?"

"Yes."

"Look here! I'm gettin' all mixed up!" cried Andrews, bothered. "You don't know the gal, yet she is to know that you're here arter her— Well, this beats Sancho!"

"You shall know all in time," Rupert said, with a quiet smile. "I do not think that my plans can fail. The very boldness of my attempt will command success."

The return of Garcia put an end to the conversation.

"Follow me, senors, and you shall have your introduction," the Spaniard said.

The three proceeded across the room.

The little group gathered around Isabel scattered and made way for the three.

Garcia, in due form, presented the two strangers.

When Isabel's eyes rested upon the dark face of the sailor, Rupert Vane, a look of inquiry appeared upon her fair features. She seemed as if she was striving to recall memories of the past.

"You are strangers to our city?" Isabel asked, with a sweet smile, directing her conversation to Rupert, but as he did not answer, Andrews did, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, senorita," he said.

"Will you stay long in Pensacola?" she asked, putting the question again to Rupert.

A spell seemed on the tongue of the sailor, for, as before, he did not answer, but turned with a questioning air to Andrews.

"I do not think that we shall make a very long stay," Andrews answered, puzzled that Rupert did not reply.

The look that appeared on the face of Isabel showed that she was disappointed in not hearing the voice of Rupert.

A moment she remained silent, her eyes fixed upon the ground as if she was deep in thought. Then a bright smile illuminated her face. She rose to her feet.

"How warm it is here," she said, half petulantly. "Senor, will you not volunteer to give me your arm and escort me to the piazza?" She addressed her speech directly to Rupert. Her quick glance detected the gleam of joy that flashed from his eyes as he offered his arm, but still he spoke not.

"Excuse me, senors," she said, as, leaning lightly upon the strong arm of the sailor, she moved away.

"If she ain't an angel I'm a grasshopper!" exclaimed Andrews, emphatically.

As the sailor and Isabel passed through the throng and disappeared in the doorway that led to the piazza, two pairs of eyes noted them.

The eyes belonged to the commandante and his son.

"Father, did you notice Isabel?" cried Estevan, white with rage. "Arm in arm with this stranger, and she refused my escort not half an hour ago."

"All women have their whims," said the commandante, calmly. "You are too hasty; patience! You have Isabel's promise to become your wife, and with that promise to aid you, it is your own fault if you can not win her love."

"I will follow your counsel," and Estevan moved slowly away. The commandante gazed after him with a sad smile.

"Hasty and quick-tempered!" he murmured. "In him I see myself, twenty-five years ago. It is odd that the face of that dark stranger should call back the past so vividly; that past that I have vainly striven to forget."

With gloomy thoughts the commandante walked slowly toward the door that gave entrance to the ball-room.

His eyes fixed upon the floor caught sight of something that glistened like coin. He stooped and picked it up.

It was a silver medal with a strange device.

The eyes of the commandante started with horror as he gazed upon it; a stifled moan of anguish came from his lips. "That terrible figure! it is an omen of evil to me and mine," he murmured.

The silver medal bore the image of a winged whale!

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE PALMETTOES.

A HUNDRED paces from the barrack, a bank of roses nestled under the shadows of a little group of palmetto trees.

The night was quite dark, but afar off on the line of the horizon, shone the faint light that told of the coming of the rising moon.

By the side of the roses stood the sailor, known as Rupert Vane, and the fair Spanish girl, Isabel.

The perfume of the flowers floated on the soft breeze of the night.

Idly Isabel plucked a rose, and from under her long eye lashes watched the face of the sailor.

"How pleasant the night is," she said, with a long breath, inhaling the perfumed air.

"Yes, it is very pleasant," Rupert replied.

"What a change from the crash of music and the giddy whirl of the ball-room," Isabel continued; "here, all is peace and rest."

"Yes, it seems to lull the senses to forgetfulness," Rupert observed, absently.

"Not so with me!" said Isabel, quickly. "This scene brings back to my memory years long past; years when, a gay and thoughtless child, I dreamed not of care or pain, and deemed the world all bright and beautiful."

"The world should be naught else to one like you, lady."

"You are pleased to flatter," replied Isabel, smiling.

"No; you are young, fair; there should be strong arms and willing hearts to protect you from all the rude blasts of this life."

A faint sigh came from Isabel's lips.

"Why do you sigh?" asked Rupert, quickly.

"I can hardly tell," and the girl smiled faintly. "I thought of something that happened long ago."

"And is the remembrance an unpleasant one?"

"No," replied Isabel, quickly. "I sighed to think that the days are gone."

"They may come again," said Rupert, carelessly.

"Yes, I am *sure* they will come again!" cried the girl quickly, and a glad light shone in her full blue eyes.

The sailor replied not, but a flash of joy was on his dark face.

"Is this your first visit to Pensacola?" Isabel asked.

"Yes, my first visit," he answered.

The answer was simple and direct, yet the quick ear of Isabel detected a double meaning in the little sentence.

"You have never been here before?"

"How could that be possible? Am I not an American—a Yankee? My home is far to the north," he said.

Isabel understood the evasion.

"Senor, it is strange how familiar your face is to me," she exclaimed, suddenly.

"My face?"

"Yes."

"How can that be possible?"

"I have seen it in a dream."

"A dream?"

"Yes, listen. It is many years ago. I am a laughing, joyous child. My father lives, and I am the darling of his heart. It is a sunny afternoon in June. I am seeking wild flowers in the wood that fringes the bayou. Suddenly on the air rings the scream of the panther. I sink on my knees in terror. Above my head, the beast clings to the arching limb; crouching low, each muscle is nerved to spring upon me. Then a youth dashes through the aisles of the forest, armed only with a broad-bladed hunting-knife. The beast springs upon and bears him to the earth. A short, fierce struggle, and then the panther rolls on his side, dead. My preserver rises to his feet, his left arm torn by the cruel teeth of the beast. I am saved, and, forgetting all except that the youth, whose face is as red as an Indian's, has saved my life, I throw myself into his arms and vow to be his wife whenever he should claim me."

"A strange dream," said Rupert, quietly.

"Yes, and yet it seems to me so much like reality," replied Isabel, with an earnest look into the swarthy face of the sailor.

"I once had a dream almost a sequel to yours," said Rupert, slowly. "Do you wish to hear it?"

"Yes," answered Isabel, with downcast eyes.

"The hero of my dream was a red-skinned youth, who was a slave, although no drop of negro blood was in his veins. Like the youth you dreamed of, he once saved the life of a young Spanish girl, his mistress, whom he loved better than all else in the world beside. His secret was discovered. The lash repaid his boldness. They tied him up and whipped him. He was a slave, and like a slave they punished him. The lashes cut into his back, but their pain was little, compared with the agony that filled his heart when the truth came to him that his love was hopeless, and that he had cherished the passion of a madman."

"And the after life of this youth?" asked Isabel, earnestly.

"My dream does not extend to that," replied Rupert,

"but still it is easy to guess at it. Humbled to the dust, and with a fiery hate of all mankind burning in his breast, he fled from Pensacola forever."

"Pensacola!" cried Isabel, with a joyous smile.

"Yes, it is here that the scene of my dream is located. In other lands he sought forgetfulness of the wrong that had been done him."

"And did he forget the girlish heart that vowed to be forever true to him?" asked Isabel, with an accent of reproach in her voice.

"No!" cried Rupert, impulsively; "as he fought his way upward in the world, one face was ever before him. Like a guiding star, it led him onward to fame and fortune. It was his beacon-light, shining afar on the troubled waters, that promised a haven of joy. He had but one thought—one wish; to be able some day to return and claim the woman that he loved."

"And will that day ever come?" asked Isabel, and a shy, glad smile was on her beautiful face.

"Suppose that he should return—that he has returned—found the girl grown into a woman, even more beautiful than her girlhood promised; suppose that the first intelligence that met his ear was that she was promised to another; would he not be apt to think that she was unworthy of his love to so soon forget the promise that she had made?"

"Rupert, judge not the heart of the girl too harshly," said Isabel, softly.

He started as his name, pronounced by the soft lips of the beautiful girl, fell upon his ears. Oh! how the old memories swept back over his soul.

"Has she not been false to the vow that she made?" asked the sailor, slowly.

"No!" replied Isabel, quickly and proudly, "the word given by the girl will be kept by the woman. Isabel never has been, nor ever will be false to Rupert."

A moment the sailor looked into the soft, blue eyes, now shining, lustrous as moonlit waves, with love's passionate fires, and then, with a gentle motion, he drew the unresisting girl to his heart.

The blue eyes looked up with glances full of love into the passionate black orbs of Rupert. Her head rested contentedly on his manly breast. The lips of the lovers met in a long, lingering kiss, the pure and holy seal of true love.

"You will be mine?" he asked, softly.

"Yes, forever and forever," she replied, smiling fondly, as she gazed with a loving look in the dark face of her sailor.

"Oh, Isabel, I have dreamed of a scene like this for many a long year," he said, smoothing back the silken, golden hair from her fair forehead.

"And so have I," she replied. "Each year I have looked for you to return and call upon me to redeem my pledge. Often in the stillness of the night have I lain awake and fancied that I saw your face in the darkness that surrounded me."

"And your face, too, has been ever by my side. I have closed my eyes and felt your soft kiss upon my lips, seen your eyes beaming love on me; and now at last, my dream is reality. Isabel, I have come to claim you," and Rupert kissed the pure white forehead, fondly.

"I am ready to fulfill my word," replied the girl, promptly.

"You will go with me then and share my fortunes?"

"Yes."

"But they may be desperate ones."

"Then the more need that I should be by your side to comfort you. The woman who truly loves will cling closer to her husband in the hour when the clouds are dark around him, than in the one when his path is in the sunshine," said Isabel, softly.

"But you know not what I have been, what I may be even now," Rupert said.

"I do not fear. The man who, as a boy, gave his arm to the panther's jaws, and risked his life to save another's, will not be likely to bring disgrace upon the woman who loves him well enough to forsake home and friends and follow his fortunes throughout the world," replied Isabel, firmly. There was no shade of doubt on the earnest face that looked into Rupert's.

"Isabel, you are an angel!" cried the sailor, fervently.

"No, I am only a woman who loves with all her heart and soul," she replied.

"And who is loved with a devotion as deep as the sea whereon I have snatched my fortune!"

"You are a sailor?"

"Yes."

"And you come to Pensacola for me?"

"Yes, again," he answered. "Isabel, I have never forgotten you for a single instant since we parted, though long years have intervened. Judge then how deep was my sorrow when I heard that you were the promised wife of this Captain Estevan. When the cruel words fell upon my ears, the very air around me seemed stifling."

"And did you believe that I was false to you?" asked the girl, reproachfully.

"No, I fought against that belief; yet long years had passed. You knew not whether I was alive or dead—perhaps thought that I would never return and demand the fulfillment of the vow that you so freely made."

"Rupert, until I knew the truth that you were dead, should still have believed that you lived; and living I felt sure that you would come for me."

"But the report that you are engaged to the son of the commandante?" the sailor asked.

"My father dying bequeathed me to the care of Don Carlos. He has ever been tender and gentle, a second father to me. He asked me if my heart was free. I evaded the question and replied that no Pensacola gentleman had won my love. He asked me then, how I liked his son, Captain Estevan. I could not tell my guardian that his son was distasteful to me; perhaps had I done so, it would have been the wiser course; but I could not bring myself to speak freely, for I knew it would pain the man who had been like a father to me. Don Carlos thought my silence gave consent. He said nothing in the world would give him greater pleasure than to see me the wife of his son. He further said he would not press me to answer then, but would give me time to think the matter over. The next day I was told that Captain Estevan had reported that I was betrothed to him."

"Isabel, the man that takes you from me must have a brave heart and a strong arm, even though he were backed by all the Spaniards in Pensacola," said Rupert, a determined light shining in his dark eyes.

"Do not fear; I have given you my word; I will keep it," and Isabel gazed fondly into the manly face of her lover.

"And you will fly with me?"

"Yes, to the ends of the earth!" replied the girl, passionately.

"It will take a few days to arrange for our flight; besides, now that I am here, there is another matter that I wish to attend to."

"In Pensacola?"

"No, in the forest amid the wigwams of the red-skins of the Appalachee tribe," replied Rupert. "But we must arrange some way of meeting. It will not do for me to come openly to the house of the commandante; it would excite suspicion."

The girl was silent for a moment; her fair brow furrowed by thought. Then, suddenly she looked up again into the face of Rupert.

"You remember the glade in the forest by the bayou?" she asked.

"Where the panther tore my arm?"

"Where you saved my life; yes."

"And you will meet me there?"

"Yes, to-morrow afternoon at three; but, let us return to the ball-room; my absence may excite remark."

Again and again the lips of the lovers met in fond caress, and then they left the shade of the palmettoes.

CHAPTER V.

SOLDIER OR CUTTHROAT?

THE soft rays of the rising moon cast a faint light over the scene. Hardly had the figures of the lovers disappeared, when another dark form stood by the little clump of palmettoes.

It was the form of Captain Estevan.

He had stolen from the ball-room, and concealed by the darkness, had watched the lovers.

Behind a group of bushes he had crouched; too far from the twain to overhear their words, yet the soft air of the night had brought the faint sound of a passionate kiss to his ears.

With features convulsed with anger he stood beneath the palmetto's shade. He saw the lovers enter the little circle of

light that came from the open ball-room door and then re-enter the room and join the gay throng of dancers.

"May Satan seize him!" cried Estevan, between his teeth, in anger. "Who can he be? A stranger evidently, and yet he conversed with her like an old friend. A friend? A lover more likely; for I'll swear that I heard the sound of a kiss. He then has touched the lips that she so coyly refused to me. The ice has melted; the statue become a woman. The girl has met this fellow before, but where? She has never left Pensacola and he is a stranger here; but stop; I jump too hastily at conclusions. They may have met years ago, before either my father or myself came to this new world. That is reasonable."

"Very reasonable," said a hoarse voice that seemed to come from the ground at the feet of the young Spaniard.

Estevan started in astonishment.

The voice seemed like an echo to his words.

"It's only me, captain," said the voice, and then a head came through the leaves of the rose-bushes, followed by a rough, ungainly body, dressed in the Spanish uniform.

"Roque Vasca!" said the captain, in astonishment.

"The same to command, noble captain," replied the soldier, rising to his feet.

The soldier was a powerful-built fellow, standing nearly six feet high. His features, gross and brutal, betrayed the drunkard and the bully.

"What are you doing here?" asked Estevan, quickly, and with a touch of anger in his voice.

"Don't be angry, senor captain," said the soldier, with a grin. "I helped to fix the old barracks there for the dance, and for the exquisite taste displayed by me in festooning the flags upon the wall, and in the arrangement of the green branches, your worthy father gave me a gold-piece—"

"Which you have spent in making a beast of yourself at the wine-house," interrupted Estevan.

"Senor captain, you are a wizard! That is exactly what I have done. A knave of a fisherman bet me that I couldn't drink ten bottles of wine and walk off with them. For the honor of the Spanish service, I couldn't decline the bet. I won, of course; then I celebrated the victory with two bottles more, and feeling tired, I laid down to sleep under the shelter of these bushes. I was awakened by the sound of voices. It was the Senorita Isabel and this foreign gallant."

"Did you overhear their conversation?" asked Estevan, eagerly.

"But little of it, senor captain. I only heard the last of it, replied the soldier.

"What did their conversation relate to?"

"First, that this strange senor seeks something in the wigwams of the Indians; what, I do not know, for he did not say; next, he arranged a place of meeting with Senorita Isabel."

"Ah! where was it, and when do they meet?" asked Estevan, in rising anger.

"My memory is dreadfully bad, senor captain," replied the soldier, with a grin.

"Your memory bad?"

"Yes; I never even remember my debts, nor how many bottles of wine I drink, when I come to pay for them. There is always a difference of two or three bottles between my reckoning and the keeper of the wine-shop's," and the soldier thrust his tongue in his cheek in a significant manner.

"You are lying, knave!" cried Estevan, in anger.

"Oh, noble captain!" exclaimed the soldier, "I swear that I speak the truth. If you doubt me, ask the keeper of the wine-shop."

"You know well where the Senorita Isabel is to meet her lover. How much do you ask for the information? Will gold cause you to remember?"

"Gold is a wonderful thing, senor," said Roque, with a comical grin; "It will do almost any thing, except restore the dead."

"Will it restore your memory?" demanded Estevan, impatiently.

"I think it will, senor," replied the soldier.

"There," and Estevan placed a gold-piece in the broad palm of Roque.

"Oh, wonderful! I do remember!" cried the soldier, briskly. "The sentorita is to meet the strange senor to-morrow afternoon at three."

"And the place?" demanded Estevan, in feverish impatience.

"In a glade in the forest by the bayou, where the strange senor once saved her life from a panther."

"That is indefinite," said Estevan, with a frown.

"By Saint Peter, it's not my fault," replied Roque; "I have related faithfully what I heard."

"There are many glades in the forest."

"Yes and many of them by the bayou."

"To-morrow?" asked Estevan, thoughtfully.

"Yes; the senorita loves the stranger; she gave up her lips freely to him. He kissed them, not once, but a dozen times."

Estevan answered not, but ground his teeth in anger.

"If I were the senor captain, I should prevent the strange senor from meeting the lady to-morrow in the forest glade," said the soldier, with his shrewd eyes fixed intently upon the passion-stirred face of his officer.

"How prevent the meeting?" asked Estevan, with a covert glance at the face of the other.

"Get the stranger to take a walk with you in the moonlight, and then have some trusty lad in ambush to put an ounce ball through his head," said Roque, coolly.

"And who will perform the task?"

"I will for five gold pieces," answered the soldier, quickly.

"It may be difficult to induce him to leave the ball-room," said Estevan, thoughtfully.

"Oh, I think not, senor captain."

"I have it!" cried Estevan, suddenly. "I have hit upon the very device."

"Good, and I'll hit your man for you!" exclaimed the soldier, with a chuckle.

"How soon will you be ready?"

"Almost immediately. I've only to go to my quarters and get my weapon."

"In twenty minutes, then?"

"I'll be ready."

"Good; the affair is understood, then?"

"Yes."

And so the two parted.

The soldier hastened in the direction of his quarters, while Estevan walked slowly toward the ball-room.

"Now, if Roque's hand be firm, the fate of my rival is sealed," the captain said, musingly. "Isabel must be mine. I am madly in love with the girl; and then, she is wealthy, too. Once she is my wife and her fortune mine, I'll leave this cursed life and return to old Spain. I hate this New World. To remain here is but living death. I'll strike this rival from my path, and then the girl is mine."

As Estevan entered the circle of light that streamed from the open doorway, a female form came from the ball-room and advanced to meet him.

The Spaniard started in astonishment as his eyes fell upon the face of the woman.

She was a girl in years, barely twenty; tall and stately in figure, a very queen in bearing. Her face was wondrously beautiful, rich olive in tint, the warm blood showing freely beneath the transparent skin. Eyes of liquid fire, black as night's mantle, lit up the face as the sun lights up the dawn. Her ebon hair curled in little crispy ringlets close to her head.

A glad smile was on her face, and eagerly, with outstretched hands, she advanced to meet the Spanish captain.

"Nanon!" exclaimed Estevan, in astonishment.

"Yes, Nanon!" exclaimed the girl, and impulsively she threw herself upon his breast.

With a quick glance around, Estevan drew the girl from the circle of light into the obscurity of the darkness caused by the shadow of the barrack.

"Why, Nanon, how came you here?" asked Estevan, in astonishment.

"Are you not glad to see me?" questioned the girl, eagerly.

"Yes, of course," he replied, in confusion.

"And yet you have not kissed me," and there was a bitter reproach lurking in the tones of her voice.

The Spaniard drew her affectionately to his breast and imprinted a kiss upon her lips.

"There, are you satisfied now?" he asked, putting on an appearance of gayety.

"Yes, you see how little it takes to satisfy me."

"But, Nanon, why are you here?" he asked.

"To see you. What other reason could bring me from New Orleans to Pensacola?"

A shade passed over Estevan's face as her words fell upon his ears.

"Did my sudden appearance surprise you?"

"Yes," he answered.

"I arrived this morning."

"Alone?"

"No; Antoine, my cousin—you remember him—he is with me."

"But, why have you come to seek me? I promised that I would return to New Orleans in a month."

"Estevan, I will speak frankly. I heard that you were to be married," and as the girl spoke, she looked eagerly in the face of the Spaniard as though she expected to read the truth there.

"Nanon, I will not deceive you," said Estevan, after remaining silent for a moment; "the report is true."

"True!" and the young girl's eyes were filled with tears.

"Yes, but listen to the reasons that led me to this course. Nanon, I am a ruined man; deeply steeped in debt; even my commission is pledged. The match was arranged by my father; my promised bride is wealthy. Her money will pay my debts. I dare not offend my father, for I am utterly in his power."

"And do you love this girl better than you do me?"

"No," he answered.

Again the smile shone on the face of the girl.

"It is only money then that separates us?"

"Yes," answered Estevan, slowly; he was unable to guess what was passing in Nanon's mind—"money and my father's will."

"Then I do not despair," said the girl, gayly.

"Why, what do you mean, Nanon?"

"Never mind; in time you will know all," she replied.

"You will remain in Pensacola?"

"Yes, until I either win or lose the stake for which I play. You will come and see me?"

"Yes."

"Here is the direction," and she gave a card into his hands. "Will you come to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"I must return to the ball, or Antoine will notice my absence. He does not yet know the motive that brings me here."

Again Nanon held up her lips for the Spaniard's kiss, and then glided from his arms and re-entered the crowded ball-room.

"Accursed luck!" cried Estevan, in despair. "What demon tempted this girl to leave Orleans and follow me here? The path before me is a difficult one. I must tread it with cautious steps."

With anger in his heart, Estevan followed the girl.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AMBUSCADE.

RUPERT escorted Isabel to her former position, and then, with a low bow, left her.

The faces of both were radiant with joy. Happiness filled their hearts; the future looked bright before them.

Andrews, who had been on the look-out for Rupert's return, joined him at once.

"What luck, cap'n?" he asked, quietly.

"The best in the world," replied Rupert, his face flushed with joy and his dark eyes shining bright with happiness.

"You've had quite a long talk with the gal?"

"Yes."

"Everything satisfactory?"

"Yes."

"All smooth water, eh?"

"Yes."

"And I s'pose you're as happy as a clam at high tide?"

"Well, I don't know exactly how happy that inhabitant of the mud is at the time you mention, but he must be very happy indeed to compare with me," Rupert replied, smiling.

"The gal is faithful?"

"True as the needle to the pole!"

"Or our brigantine to her helm, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, women are queer cattle; leastways, I've always found 'em so," said Andrews, reflectively. "Sometimes they'll hang onto a fellow like grim death; and then ag'in, their grip is so light that a cat's-paw of wind will break it. Your gal seems to be one of the hold-fast kind."

"Yes, I'd stake my life upon the truth of her love!" said Rupert, impulsively. "It is eight years since I have held her in my arms—since she told me that she loved me and

would be mine. She was but a child then, but the woman holds still to the word given. Years have only increased her love. She is willing to fly with me when I say the word. She will forsake home, friends, all, for me."

"Well, now, she's a reg'lar stunner!" said Andrews, in admiration.

"She's an angel!"

"Without wings and dressed in petticoats," the Yankee added, laughing. "But how soon are you going to take the gal?"

"I cannot tell yet," Rupert replied, thoughtfully. "That depends upon circumstances. I have some other matters to attend to first."

"Other matters!" exclaimed Andrews, in surprise.

"Yes; it is not the quest of the girl alone that has brought me to Pensacola."

"What else?"

"I have a mission to fulfill; a wrong to be righted," replied the sailor, and a cloud passed over his handsome features.

"By the way, cap'n," said Andrews, suddenly, "did you tell the girl who and what you was?"

"No; she only knows that my name is Rupert, and that I am a sailor."

"I think that it is better for you to keep your secret to yourself than to reveal it," said Andrews.

"We have little to fear, even if it was openly known in Pensacola that we are in the neighborhood," Rupert said, carelessly.

"Well, I don't know that," replied Andrews, with a dubious shake of the head. "The saucy brigantine has made a name for herself on the high seas, and there's many a man-of-war captain that would give a handsome sum to lay his vessel alongside of her."

"That will never be," answered Rupert, quickly; "on the broad ocean there's not a frigate that our beauty can't show a clean pair of heels to."

"That's so, cap'n; but if these Spaniards should discover that we are in the neighborhood and send information to our foes, they might come upon us unawares."

"We must be careful and disguise our presence, then," said Rupert, thoughtfully.

"That's jest my ideas on that p'int."

"To-morrow I shall seek the chief of the Appalachee nation. In the wigwams of the red-skins I may procure the information that I wish. That task done, then I'll bear away my bride, and on the broad, blue waters laugh defiance to pursuit."

"Oh, cap'n, I forgot!" cried Andrews, suddenly.

"What?" asked Rupert.

"Do you know Captain Estevan, the son of the commandante of this post?"

"No."

"You know that Senor Garcia said he was to be married to this little gal?"

"Yes; but the report is untrue."

"Jes' so; but when you left the ball-room jest now, I noticed that this Estevan follered arter; it looks to me as if he was a-kinder spyin' on you."

Rupert's brow darkened.

"Let him take care," he said, with an accent of menace in his tone.

"I had an idea that he was kinder hankerin' arter the gal, for he didn't look a bit pleased," Andrews said, shrewdly.

"He is in love with Isabel and seeks her hand."

"Your rival, eh?"

"Yes."

"Better look out for yourself then, for the Spaniards are treacherous cusses; they had jest as lief stick a critter in the back as eat their fodder," Andrews said, seriously.

"I have very little fear!" said Rupert, contemptuously. "If this Captain Estevan ever measures wits or weapons with me, I fancy that he will dearly rue it."

"Yes, but he won't do it fairly; these tan-colored dons are up to all sorts of mean tricks, so jest keep your eyes open," Andrews said, in warning.

"Rest assured that I shall not walk blindly into any trap that may be laid for me," Rupert replied. "You say that this Spaniard followed Isabel and myself from the ball-room?"

"Yes," Andrews answered.

"Could it have been for the purpose of spying upon our interview?"

"Well, it looks like it to me."

"Have you noticed whether he has returned or not?"

"Yes; he has not come back yet. Ah, there he is now, by jingo!" and as Andrews spoke, the Spaniard entered the ball-room.

A moment Estevan looked around him, and then, seeing the two Americans standing together, he came toward them.

"He's coming this way; he's got his eyes on us," Andrews said, noticing the movement of Estevan.

"He seems to be in search of some one."

"And that some one is a chap about your size, cap'n," Andrews said.

"He'll find me without any trouble."

The approach of the Spaniard forbade further conversation.

"Can I have a word with you, sir?" Estevan asked, bowing politely.

"Certainly," replied Rupert, returning the salutation.

"Excuse me for a moment," he said to Andrews, and then he followed the captain.

"As what I have to say to you may take up some little time, suppose we procure our hats and adjourn to the open air."

"As you please," replied Rupert, carelessly.

The hats procured, Estevan led the way to the open air.

The moon shed its soft light over the earth.

"Is there any particular direction in which the senor would prefer to walk?" Estevan asked.

"No, all ways are alike to me," Rupert replied, carelessly.

"Let us turn to the right, then. The path leads to the forest. We shall be secure from observation."

"Lead on, sir."

The two proceeded on their way.

Rupert's face showed not a sign of suspicion, yet his hand, which he had thrust carelessly into his bosom, grasped a loaded pistol.

He was prepared for danger, if danger came.

Ten minutes' walk brought the twain to the edge of the timber that fringed the line of the city.

"Here we can speak freely and without danger of being overheard, senor," said Estevan, turning and facing the sailor.

"I am at your service, sir," Rupert said, calmly.

"If I mistake not, you are a stranger to our city?"

"You are right; I am."

"But you are acquainted with Senorita Morena?"

"Yes."

"May I ask the nature of that acquaintance?"

"You may," said Rupert, with an unruffled smile.

"And the nature is—"

"Stop; you are proceeding a little too fast; I said that you might ask the nature of the acquaintanceship, but I did not say that I would answer the question," and Rupert smiled, beamingly, in the face of the Spaniard.

Estevan colored to the temples. He felt that he was being played upon.

"You are laughing at me, senor!" exclaimed the Spaniard, striving to hold his anger in check and appear outwardly as calm as his rival; for, in his own mind, he felt sure that the dark-hued stranger held that position in regard to him.

"Laughing at you, senor captain!" cried Rupert, in a tone of great astonishment, which was plainly assumed for the occasion.

Estevan bit his lip; for the moment he did not dare to trust himself to speak.

"I believe that I am speaking correctly in addressing you as Captain Estevan, although I have never had the exquisite pleasure of making your acquaintance," continued Rupert, blandly.

"Yes, I am Captain Estevan Alvarado, and the affianced husband of Senorita Isabel."

"So I have been told," said Rupert, calmly and without exhibiting any sign of emotion. "I congratulate you upon the happiness before you."

"Congratulate the devil!" exclaimed the Spaniard, in a rage.

"Oh, softly and gently," smilingly said Rupert; "don't lose your temper. You may need it all before we get through with this interview."

There was a latent menace in the words of the sailor that fell discordantly upon the ear of Estevan.

"Senor, you can not deceive me with your evasive words,

I know that you have met the lady who is to be my wife in secret to-night!" cried the Spaniard, quickly.

"And so you set spies to watch the senorita, eh?" questioned Rupert, contemptuously.

"Your question is an insolent one, and I shall not answer it," replied Estevan, haughtily.

"Let us terminate this interview at once," said the sailor, abruptly. "What do you want with me?"

"To warn you from the path that you are treading."

"Bah! I laugh at warnings!"

"Then the consequences of your rashness be on your own head."

Estevan turned upon his heel as if to depart.

"Is this all you have to say?" Rupert asked.

"Yes," and the Spaniard walked rapidly away.

"Does he think to frighten me with empty words?" and a scornful smile curled Rupert's lips. "He little knows Red Rupert. I'll have Isabel, if I have to level every roof in Pensacola to win her."

The footfall of the Spaniard died away in the distance.

Rupert slowly proceeded in his footsteps.

A dozen paces had he walked, when suddenly he halted.

His eyes were fixed upon a small cluster of bushes some fifty feet in front of him to the right.

He saw a gun-barrel gleam in the moonlight among the foliage of the bushes. It was aimed directly at his heart.

He halted, for death stared him in the face.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT IN THE MOONLIGHT.

WITH compressed brows the young sailor stared at the shining barrel.

First he thought that it was but fancy, but a second glance convinced him that his eyes had not deceived him, and that in truth it was a musket-barrel on which the moonbeams played.

No friend but a foe awaited him. In a moment he guessed that he had been led into a trap. He understood now—too late—the device of the wily Spanish captain.

"The accursed coward!" Rupert muttered between his clenched teeth. "Why did he not dare me to meet him as man meets man, in fair and open fight? But no; he entraps me into an ambush; kills me by the hand of a hired ruffian from behind a bush. I have looked upon death too many times, to be frightened by it now."

Seconds lengthened into minutes, yet still the death-shot came not.

Rupert stood motionless as a statue.

His face was as calm as though chiseled out of marble.

The bushes stirred; the cat had played long enough with its prey; the flint came down upon the steel, but no report followed; the matchlock had missed fire.

By a miracle, almost, Red Rupert had escaped the death so cunningly devised.

A dozen nimble bounds, and the sailor gained the shelter of the forest and disappeared from view behind the fringe of bushes.

A muttered curse came from the man in ambush.

The prey had escaped.

All then was still.

In the covert of the bushes lay Roque Vasca, like some huge beast. He had reprimed his musket and prayed to all the saints to give him another chance at the young sailor.

Eagerly he watched the wood. No form stirred within the leafy covert.

"May Satan take the cursed musket!" he muttered in anger. "I would have drilled a hole right through him if the powder had not flashed in the pan. Let him show as much as an ear now and I'll warrant that I'll not miss him."

With searching eyes, the soldier looked upon the dark line of the forest, but he looked in vain for a human form.

"Perhaps he's plunged into the wood and will make a wide circle and thus gain the town without passing me. He is wise not to give me a second chance. I'd not miss again. No five pieces of gold will I finger, and all because the cursed gun missed fire. Why, I wouldn't have given a copper-piece for his life."

Then Roque fancied that he could distinguish the outline of a human head peeping out from behind a tree-trunk, on the edge of the forest, some fifty paces to the right.

"If that is my bird I must change the line of my piece," he muttered, as he gazed long and earnestly at the object that he supposed was the head of the stranger.

Suddenly the head disappeared.

Roque was now convinced that his eyes had not deceived him.

A grim smile came over his swarthy face.

Quietly he sighted his piece upon the spot where he had seen the head, and waited with breathless impatience for it to appear again.

He did not have long to wait, for ere ten minutes had passed, the head again appeared.

The soldier ran his eye along the shining barrel. Again the hammer descended; this time, the loud report of the musket followed and rung out clearly on the still air of the night.

Then, to the listening ears of the ambushed assassin came the sound of a deep groan and a heavy fall.

The aim of the soldier had been true.

Up from his covert in the bushes rose the Spaniard with a hoarse laugh of triumph.

"The five gold pieces are mine, and I'll drink deep of red wine ere the morning light comes!" he cried in triumph. "I knew that my aim was sure. By Saint Peter, I never miss my mark. Now I'll return to the city." And the soldier turned half around. "But stay! I wonder if my gallant is dead? Shall I examine him and see?" Then the Spaniard pondered on the question. "But no! I care not whether he be dead or alive. There can hardly be a question about it though. A man can't very well live with an ounce ball through his head. But I'll see."

And with this resolution, Roque proceeded toward the forest.

All was still; no moans of anguish met his ear.

"Killed outright," he muttered, as he entered the shadows cast by the wood.

But, Roque was not destined to reach the spot where the body of his victim should lie, for, out of the bushes, a muscular form sprung upon him.

Although taken by surprise, the Spaniard made a determined resistance, but his efforts were fruitless. With a grip of iron the assailant fastened upon him. A sudden twist and the brawny Spaniard sprawled upon the ground, hurled there with terrible force.

Half stunned and bleeding from the force of the concussion, Roque glared upward into the face of his unknown assailant, who, with his knee upon his breast and a broad-bladed knife at his throat, held the soldier completely in his power.

The stern gaze that bent over him, was that of Red Rupert, the sailor.

"Cowardly hound! why should I not bury this knife in your throat?" questioned Rupert, in anger.

"Mercy, senor," Roque gasped, in mortal terror, yet though he begged for mercy he saw but little hope of getting it in the frowning face of the sailor.

"Why should I show mercy to you, assassin?" questioned Rupert.

"It is all a mistake," gasped Roque.

"A mistake?"

"Yes, I thought you were somebody else."

"Who else?" asked Rupert, quickly.

"Why—" and Roque hesitated; even his cunning was at fault.

"Why do you not speak? or do you hesitate to gain time to think of a lie to cheat me with?" the sailor said, contemptuously.

"By Saint Peter, I swear that I never dreamed that it was you," Roque cried. "I thought that it was Pablo, the fisherman. He cheated me at cards yesterday in the wine-shop, and I swore to be revenged upon him."

"Do I look like Pablo, the fisherman?" Rupert asked, with a sneer.

"Oh, wonderful!" cried the soldier.

"You are lying again!"

"I swear that I speak the truth!"

"Don't sell your soul to eternal perdition by swearing falsely!" cried Rupert, sternly. "Am I dressed like a fisherman?"

"No, senor," stammered Roque; "but, in the darkness, I mistook you for him."

"In the darkness!" Rupert exclaimed, contemptuously.

"When I first saw the barrel of your musket gleaming in the foliage of the bushes, I stood in the opening, in the full

light of the moonbeams, not fifty feet from you. You did not attempt to fire on the instant, but calmly waited. You had plenty of time to see who and what I was."

"I was blinded by anger," Roque muttered, in confusion. "I swear, senor, that I never noticed your face!"

"Not even when you leveled your musket directly at my heart?"

"No, senor; I swear by all the saints in heaven that I thought that you were Pablo," protested Roque. "Why should I attempt your life? You are a stranger to me. There is no reason. I am not a tiger that kills for love of killing."

"Why attempt my life? Ay! that's the riddle that I wish to solve," Rupert said, calmly. "Whether you live or die, depends upon you alone. When your musket missed fire, and I gained the shelter of the wood, I determined to learn who you were and what was the motive that bade you seek the life of a stranger. With my hat I drew your fire, then tricked you by the assumed signs of death; lured you within my power. Now your life is in my hands. One little motion of my arm and the steel of my knife will be reddened with your blood."

"Senor, spare me!" the soldier gasped, in terror.

"Reveal to me, then, why you sought my life?"

"I had no motive but—"

"But what?" demanded Rupert, sternly.

"I—I saw you leave the ball-room, and thinking that you might have gold, I followed you."

"This is the truth?"

"I swear it, senor!"

"You lie again, you cowardly assassin!" cried Rupert, in anger. "I am losing patience. One more chance will I give you for your life. Answer my question at once, and truly, too, or I'll drive the point of my knife into your throat."

The face of Rupert told the Spaniard that he would keep his word.

The swarthy features of the soldier turned a sickly yellow with fear. Helpless beneath the knee of the man he had attempted to murder, Roque saw that escape was hopeless.

"Spare me!" he murmured, in terror, "I will confess all."

"Speak, and quickly!"

"Captain Estevan, the son of the commandante, promised me— But you will spare my life if I tell you all?"

"Yes; go on."

"He promised me five gold pieces if I would assassinate you."

"And it was to give you a chance to fulfill your part of the bargain that this noble Spaniard decoyed me here?"

"Yes," Roque said, humbly.

Rupert rose to his feet.

"You are free; go, and tell your cowardly captain that in the morning he may expect a message from me. He either meets me in a fair fight or I'll brand him as a coward in the street of yonder city."

Roque did not wait for a second bidding.

Nimbly, he took his way back to the city.

Rupert watched him till he was out of sight, and then slowly followed in his footsteps.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF THE ASSASSIN.

ROQUE cursed his ill luck as he proceeded with hasty steps back to Pensacola.

"Tell the captain that he may expect a challenge from this American devil to-morrow evening, eh? Oh, no; that would betray that I had spoken and revealed that it was Captain Estevan who had hired me to put this red stranger out of the way. I'm in a hobble. I have failed to do my work, and thereby lose five gold pieces. That's bad enough. But if the captain suspects that I have betrayed him to the stranger, that would be far worse. No, I must lie out of it. Oh! Mercury, great king of liars, lend me thy aid! I must cudgel my wits. By Saint Peter, that red imp of Satan has frightened me out of a year's growth. I fancy that I can feel the point of his knife pricking my throat even now," and Roque shivered as he spoke. "It will take a dozen bottles of wine to cure me of the effects of this fright."

The soldier, proceeding at a rapid pace, soon reached the town.

He went at once to the barrack where the ball was in progress.

Approaching the door that looked upon the group of palmettoes, where he had made the compact with his captain to murder the American, he cautiously peered in upon the dancers.

The quick eye of Estevan, who had been on the watch for Rupert's return, detected him.

Carelessly, the Spaniard strolled to the door, and then, stepping from the threshold to the open air, joined him.

"Well?" questioned the captain, eagerly, as he led the way from the building toward the shrubbery.

"It is not well, senor captain," said Roque, dolefully.

"Ah!" and a frown came over Estevan's face, "you have not succeeded, then? The American still lives?"

"Yes, senor."

The look upon Estevan's face showed plainly how deeply he was disappointed.

"How was it that you failed?"

"The musket missed fire; may Satan fly away with it!" Roque said, in anger.

"Missed fire?"

"Yes, flashed in the pan. Then, with a spring like a panther, the American sprung into the shelter of the wood. I primed my piece afresh and waited for him to appear."

"And did he?"

"No, he tricked me," replied Roque, sullenly. "He stuck his hat out from behind a tree. I thought that his head was in it and put a ball through it. Then he groaned as if in mortal pain. I left my ambush and went to finish him. The moment I came near the wood he leaped upon me from behind a tree and bore me over to the earth; this imp of an American has the strength of a giant."

"He overpowered you?" said Estevan, a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"Yes, and held his knife at my throat. You can see, captain, the mark where the point of the blade scratched the skin," and Roque pointed to his brawny throat where the livid mark appeared.

"Yet he didn't kill you!" said the Spanish captain in a tone that indicated extreme astonishment.

"No, but he might as well, for he frightened me almost to death."

"Why did he spare you?"

"That he might make me confess who set me on to assassinate him."

"Ah!" and Estevan started in alarm, "he suspected, then?"

"Yes, and swore that he would bury his blade in my throat if I did not speak."

"Of course, to save your life, you did confess," Estevan said, sullenly. He had very little faith in either the courage or the honor of the soldier.

"What? I confess, noble captain?" cried Roque in a tone of virtuous indignation; "what do you take me for?"

If Estevan had answered, he would have said, for a thorough scoundrel; as it was, he made no reply, but the expression upon his face told of unbelief in the soldier's veracity.

"No, noble captain; even when this heretic held his knife at my throat and the point of it scratched my flesh, I swore stoutly that it was all a mistake and that I mistook him for somebody else."

"And did he believe your words?"

"No," Roque replied. "To tell the honest truth and shame the Evil One, he suspected that you had a hand in the affair."

"Ah, he said so, then?" and Estevan's face looked dark indeed as he put the question.

"Yes, senor. I swore stoutly that it was not so. Why, boiling oil would not have made me betray my noble captain!" exclaimed Roque, with great dignity.

"Roque, you are such a notorious liar that even when you speak the truth it is hard to believe you," said Estevan, gravely.

"True, captain, I do lie sometimes, but not on great occasions like this. May I never drink wine again if I have not spoken the truth and nothing but the truth!" protested the soldier, vigorously.

"Then the stranger suspected that it was by my orders that you attempted his life?" Estevan asked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, senor, although I swore that it was not so."

"But he spared you."

"Yes, that I might bring a message to you."

"And that message?"

"That to-morrow you might expect a challenge to mortal combat, and he further said that if you refused he would publicly post you as a coward in the streets of Pensacola."

Estevan's eyes flashed fire.

"He need not fear. I'll meet him readily enough!" he exclaimed.

"Senor captain, touching the five gold pieces?" said Roque, looking askance at his officer.

"The price of the American's life, not the attempt that has resulted in failure," said Estevan, coldly.

"By all the saints above and all the fiends below, it is not my fault if the American is not dead!" cried Roque, in a tone that clearly betrayed how much his feelings were injured. "I did the best I could. Man is but mortal; fate was against me; how could I help it if the American escaped? I feel it deeply, here," and Roque put his hand upon his heart and sighed, pathetically. "I shall die with mortification if I do not drown my emotions in wine. I haven't a copper-piece, and the keeper of the wine-shop is a beast who refuses to trust to my honor for payment. Senor Captain, have mercy on me and give me one gold-piece at least, if not five."

"Your eloquence would move a marble statue, Roque; here is your gold-piece," and Estevan gave it to him as he spoke.

"Oh, senor, you are as generous as a prince!" cried Roque, in joy. "Any further commands?"

Estevan shook his head.

With a low bow the soldier departed.

The Spanish captain remained for a few minutes motionless; his eyes bent upon the ground in deep thought. A troubled look was upon his face.

"The tide runs counter," he muttered. "I must be careful or my bark of life will strike upon the rocks and all my hopes be shipwrecked. Everything seems to go wrong. What demon sent this man here? Who and what is he, too? Where and when did Isabel meet him? These are difficult questions to answer. Time alone will furnish me with the solutions of these mysteries. And Nanon, too—what evil fortune sent her here at this critical moment? All before me is darkness; clouds everywhere, and no ray of light breaking through them."

Then Estevan walked slowly back to the ball-room.

"To-morrow I am to receive a challenge from this rival, who, like a phantom, has appeared so suddenly in my path. I'll meet him! If my wrist hasn't forgotten its cunning, I'll send him to the shades below. That will be one obstacle the less in my way."

When Estevan re-entered upon the gay scene, no one would have guessed that his thoughts were of blood and death.

As the Spanish captain stepped into the lighted room, graced with so much love and beauty, his father, the commandante, advanced to him.

Estevan noticed that his father's face wore a troubled look.

"What is the matter, father?" the son asked; "your face is as pale as death."

"Is it so?" the commandante said, nervously.

"Yes, you look quite ill. What has happened?"

"Nothing in particular, and yet—Estevan, look at this!" and the father held out his hand. In the palm of it glistened the silver medal that bore on its surface the strange device of a Winged Whale.

Estevan examined the medal with curiosity.

"It is a whale with wings," he said, in astonishment. "What a strange idea!"

"Yes; the moment my eyes fell upon it, a chill of terror shot through my heart." The voice of the commandante betrayed how deeply he was affected.

Estevan looked at his father in astonishment. He could not understand the meaning of his strange emotions.

"The sight of this causes you pain?" he said, in wonder.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"That I cannot fully explain, even to you, my son," the commandante replied, hastily.

Estevan's wonder increased.

"You have seen such a figure as this before, then?"

"Yes, long, long years ago," Don Carlos replied, deep agony in his tones.

"How came this medal in your possession?" Estevan asked, vainly striving to find some solution to the strange mystery.

"I found it but an hour or so ago, lying upon the floor," the father replied. "I saw something glitter at my feet; I stooped, picked it up, and was transfixed with horror when my eyes fell upon the semblance of the Winged Whale."

"But how could it have come here?"

"That is what I cannot tell—cannot even guess. I am bewildered; my brain is wandering in a labyrinth, to the outlet of which I can find no clue," exclaimed the commandante, evidently laboring under some strong excitement.

"But I cannot understand why the sight of this little medal, even though it has an odd device stamped upon it, should cause you to be so agitated," Estevan said.

"My son, the sight of it recalled memories of years long past. The image of the Winged Whale brings to my mind the memory of a crime that I committed in early youth—a crime, the memory of which has banished sleep from my eyes many a long hour in the still night. This is the reason of my agitation. Finding this piece of silver seems like a warning from the other world. Perhaps, even now, after years have passed, I am to be called to an account for the deed done when the hot passions of youth ran riot in my veins."

"But, father, what have you to fear?" questioned Estevan. "You are commandante of Pensacola—supreme in power. You are above the law, for you are the law. Who, then, can call you to a reckoning for deeds done many years ago?"

"One that is above all earthly rulers—the Great Judge of heaven, who tries alike the king and the beggar," said the commandante, in solemn tones. "Think not, Estevan, that I fear mortal vengeance; no, I have no living foes that can work me harm. The ones I wronged were a lovely, helpless girl and an innocent babe. I fear that they are waiting above, before the Great Tribunal, to accuse me."

To the mind of the young soldier the speech of his father seemed like the utterance of one whose mind was wandering.

"This medal is the work of mortal hands," the son said. "If it was placed in your way as a warning of danger, the act was performed by human, not by spirit hands."

"Perhaps so; and yet it seems to me like an omen of evil sent by those who long years ago passed from earth," replied the father, sadly.

"I'll take it upon myself to try and discover from whence this strange medal came!" exclaimed Estevan.

"As you please; but I am sure that the Winged Whale is an omen of evil to us," the commandante said, gravely.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHIEF OF THE CHICKASAW.

"I, too, have made a discovery to-night, father," abruptly said Estevan, after a short pause.

"What is its nature?"

"Regarding Isabel."

The commandante looked into the dark face of his son for a moment, as if he expected to read his discovery there. The look convinced the father that the discovery was any thing but a pleasant one in its nature.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Isabel has a lover."

"A lover!" The commandante started in surprise.

"Yes; one to whom she freely yields her lips; most assuredly a favored lover," Estevan said, with bitter accent.

"There must be some mistake in this," the commandante exclaimed, hastily. "If she has a lover I should know of it. Estevan, you are wrong."

"By Heaven, I swear that I am right!" the son replied. "I marked the twain leaving the ball-room to-night, and stole after them, for I suspected that something was wrong. They conversed together some twenty minutes under a group of palmettoes, a hundred paces or so from the house, and when Isabel parted with my favored rival, he kissed her, not once, but a dozen times."

"Estevan, you have been dreaming!" Don Carlos exclaimed, in haste.

"Would that I had been, but it is the truth!" Estevan said, bitterly. "Roque Vasca was sleeping off the effects of a drunken carouse under some bushes near where the two stood. He heard part of their conversation; Isabel arranged to meet this lover by stealth to-morrow in the forest."

"Who is the man?"

"Have you noticed two strangers—Americans—here to night; one with a face almost as red as an Indian? There he is now." Estevan pointed to the door. Even as he spoke, Rupert and Andrews entered the room.

The commandante started when his eyes looked upon the face of Rupert.

"He the lover of Isabel?" he murmured.

"Yes."

"This is more than chance; it is fatality!" the commandante exclaimed, evidently laboring under the influence of some strange emotion.

"What do you mean, father?" asked Estevan, in surprise.

"This man's face produces a strange effect upon me. I do not know him; he is young; yet I am sure that, in some way, he's connected with my early life. Perhaps he is a minister of vengeance. The Winged Whale bodes danger to me; this man may be the instrument by which I am to be stricken." The face of the commandante showed plainly how deeply he was affected.

"It is as well then, to destroy the instrument," said Estevan, dryly.

"No, no!" exclaimed the father, "he must not be harmed! Leave him to me."

"Well and good, if he cross not my way; if he does, let him look to himself. I do not intend to yield Isabel without a struggle. I love her, and she shall be mine in spite of all the Americans in the world."

"Do nothing rashly," said the commandante, in warning.

"I will speak to this stranger and discover, if it be possible, who and what he is; also, what object brings him to Pensacola."

"I am afraid that you will not be able to learn much. From his dress and manner, he is evidently a sailor; probably one of Lafitte's gang of buccaneers that ravage the Gulf," Estevan remarked, with a scowling brow.

"A pirate?"

"Yes; and if he is one, and we discover that his intentions are hostile to us, a file of soldiers and a dozen loaded muskets will remove him from our way. If he is one of Lafitte's gang, of course his life is forfeit; we but execute the vengeance of the law upon him, not serve private malice."

"For the present, leave him to me. I'll question him at once," and the commandante, leaving Estevan, advanced toward the strangers.

"It is as well that I did not tell him that I have already attempted the life of this man and failed in my purpose," Estevan muttered, "Why should the face of this red heretic affect my father so strangely? It must be only imagination, his belief that this man is in some way connected with the events of his early life. But be that as it may, I swear that he shall not take Isabel from me."

As Estevan stood watching the sailor he noticed that the eyes of Isabel often wandered to Rupert's face. And the glad smile that lit up her features, told that she was happy—happy in his presence.

All this Estevan noted, and it galled him to the quick. In his heart he swore bitter vengeance upon his rival.

Rupert, after letting the soldier rise from beneath his knee and depart, had returned slowly to the city.

On the road he had met Andrews hastening in search of him.

The keen-eyed Yankee had noticed the departure of Rupert and the Spanish captain from the ball-room and had seen the Spaniard return alone. Suspecting danger to his friend he had left the gay throng of dancers and hastened in search of Rupert. Chance had led him in the right direction.

"By jingo!" Andrews cried, in joy, as he met Rupert, "I was 'tarnally afeared that something was out of kilter. All right, eh? I see'd that all-fired cuss, the captain, come back alone, and I kinder suspected that he'd give you a poke in the ribs on the sly, somewhere."

"I am unhurt," Rupert replied. And then he related to Andrews the attempt that had been made upon his life, the twain proceeding toward the town as they conversed.

The Yankee listened in astonishment.

"Well, you did have a narrow shave, eh?"

"A miss is as good as a mile," said Rupert, laughing.

"Jes' so; but what are you going to do about it? You ain't going to let the matter slide without taking any notice of it, are you?"

"No, to-morrow you shall bear a challenge to this cowardly assassin to meet me in fair and open fight," Rupert said, his eyes sparkling.

"And if he refuses?"

"I'll horsewhip him in the open streets of Pensacola," Rupert cried, in heat. "But, he will not refuse. He bears the rank of captain in the Spanish service; that rank he dares not disgrace by refusing to meet me. The act would cost him his social position; yes, even his commission, for his brother officers would not associate with a poltroon. He'll meet me fast enough."

"And you'll give him jesse, eh?"

"I'll try to," replied the sailor, with a quiet smile.

By this time they had reached the barrack again.

They entered and mingled with the gay throng.

Andrews' quick eyes perceived the commandante approaching them.

"Here's the king-pin coming," he said, calling Rupert's attention to the approach of the Spanish commander.

"Leave me for a few moments, Andrews. I have an idea that he has something to say to me privately."

With a shrewd wink the Yankee moved carelessly away.

The Spaniard came on straight to where the young man stood.

"Good-evening, senor," Don Carlos said, politely.

Rupert acknowledged the greeting.

"I believe that you are a stranger here. As I haven't had the pleasure of an introduction, I will introduce myself. I am Carlos Alvarado, Commandante of Pensacola," and he extended his hand frankly.

"My name is Rupert Vane; by profession a sailor," said Rupert, taking the offered hand.

"I am pleased to meet you, senor," said the commandante, bowing with easy grace, but there was a strange expression upon his face. The tone of Rupert's voice sounded very familiar to his ears.

"The pleasure is mutual," Rupert replied.

"Will your business detain you long in our city?"

"I can hardly call it business," the sailor said, with a smile, and his eyes rested upon the fair face of Isabel as he spoke. "My visit to Pensacola partakes more of a pleasure trip than aught else."

"I trust that you will find time to call upon me," and the eyes of the commandante looked searchingly into the face of the young man as he spoke.

"There can hardly be a doubt of that," Rupert smilingly replied.

With a courtly bow the commandante left him.

The face of the Spaniard was clouded over with thought, as with his eyes bent upon the floor he walked slowly across the room.

"It can not be," he muttered; "and yet how like the eyes are. The same fiery orbs flash before me that dazzled my senses long years ago in the mazes of the forest. But this young man is too old; no, hardly! How can I discover the truth?"

The commandante had made his way through the gay and brilliant crowd, and as he finished his muttered speech, he found himself near one of the doors that led into the yard of the barrack.

The door was open and in the space stood an Indian chief gazing with stolid face upon the brilliant scene.

The Indian was an aged warrior; marks of care and of battle were upon his massive face.

The commandante gazed with surprise upon the figure of the savage.

He knew the face of the chief, although it had been years since he had looked upon it.

"He comes like an answer to my thought," the Spaniard muttered. "From him I can learn the truth."

Then the commandante approached the Indian.

The chief saw him coming, but not a muscle of his face moved. Still he looked with vacant eyes upon the groups of revelers.

The Spaniard halted in front of the Indian.

"My brother is welcome," the commandante said.

Gravely bending his head, the Indian acknowledged the salutation.

"What does my red brother seek in the lodges of the pale-face?"

The savage extended his hand, showing the open palm.

"Nothing?" The commandante guessed the meaning of the chief. In days gone by, he had dwelt in the Indian lodges and learned their ways.

The chief bowed assent.

"Will not my brother eat and drink?"

The Indian shook his head.

"The red chief has forgotten his white brother."

The Indian turned his stolid gaze upon the commandante, but there was no look of recognition upon his features.

"There was a time when O-tee-hee was the greatest warrior in the Appalachee nation. Often he has hunted the red deer in the lands of the Natchez with Steel-arm, the Spaniard, who left his brothers to dwell in the wigwams of the Appalachees."

The fixed muscles of the Indian's face moved not. The speech of the commandante affected him not a whit.

"O-tee-hee has gone to the spirit-land; he hunts the red deer in Manitou's bosom," said the Indian, gravely.

"Why does the red-man force his white brother to tell him that he speaks with a forked tongue?" demanded the Spaniard, in a tone of reproach. "O-tee-hee is not dead, for he stands before his white brother."

"O-tee-hee, taken prisoner by the Chickasaws, goes to spirit-land. The Snake-with-three-tails is a great chief of the Chickasaws. Scalps are many in his wigwam."

The Spaniard understood the riddle.

"The chief may now be a Chickasaw, but to his white brother he will ever be an Appalachee brave. Does the chief remember Lupah, the singing-bird? If so, let him look there," and the commandante pointed into the ball-room.

The dull eyes of the Indian glared with a strange light as he looked upon the features of Red Rupert.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHALLENGE.

THE morning that succeeded the night on which the events related in the preceding chapters took place, broke bright and beautiful.

About ten o'clock the American, Andrews, proceeded to the quarters occupied by the Spanish officers who commanded the soldiers that garrisoned Pensacola.

He had very little trouble in finding the rooms occupied by Captain Estevan.

The Spaniard seemed annoyed when his visitor was shown into his quarters.

"Captain Estevan, I believe," said Andrews, bowing politely.

"The same, sir, at your service," Estevan replied.

"My name is Andrews—Decius Andrews. I come to you on behalf of my friend, Rupert Vane. I suppose you understand the nature of my visit?"

"I suppose you bear a hostile message?"

"Exectly," Andrews said, with another bow.

"I have not the pleasure of being acquainted with the person you represent; that is, I have never been formally introduced to him," Estevan said, sneeringly.

"It don't make the least bit of difference," Andrews replied, quietly; "he'd just as lief fight you as his bosom friend, and perhaps a little liefer."

"But, I am not quite sure that the person that you represent—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Andrews, "you've said 'person' twice. I think that you are laboring under a mistake. I represent a *gentleman* named Rupert Vane."

Estevan bit his lip. The coolness of the American annoyed him.

"The term makes very little difference," he said, haughtily.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, it makes a great deal of difference to me if it don't to you," Andrews remarked, coolly. "Now, when I call you a gentleman, you can't object to the title, even if, in your mind, you know that you aren't one."

"Senor, do you mean to insult me?" cried Estevan, in rage.

"Insult! not a bit of it—that is, not at present. I'm here on another man's quarrel; arter you get through with him, if you want to take a hack at me, I don't mind accommodating you from ten-pounders down to pop-guns; I like to be agreeable," Andrews said, with a beaming smile upon his thin features.

"Enough of this folly! To business, sir!" cried the Spaniard, abruptly.

"Jes' so. Then, on behalf of my friend, Mr. Rupert Vane, I demand the satisfaction due from one gentleman to another."

"I am an officer in the Spanish service. I can not condescend to measure weapons with an unknown blackguard," Estevan said, in contempt.

Andrews looked at the Spaniard for a moment, and the look upon his features told that he was debating some difficult problem in his mind.

"Well, I don't know," he said, at length. "I hain't had much experience in these affairs of honor, as they call 'em, and I don't know how far my duties as a second ought to extend. I've a doubt on the subject. If you called my principal a blackguard to his face, he would have pitched you out of that window, and I ain't sure but what I ought to do it as his second; but, as I said, I ain't quite posted, and the p'int bothers me. I'll let it pass this time; but be careful, for the next delicate expression that you use like that, I'll pitch you through that window if it takes me right out of my boots."

One glance at the brawny figure of the stalwart Yankee, and the Spaniard felt convinced that he could keep his word if inclined so to do.

"But, as I said afore, I'm a second, not a first. I ain't come to fight, but to arrange a fight. Now, if you have any doubts about my friend, Mr. Vane, being worthy to meet you, he'll quickly remove 'em."

"Indeed, how?" asked Estevan, scornfully.

"He'll take a good-sized whip and gi'n you the darnedest hiding you ever did have, the first time he meets you in the street," replied Andrews, coolly.

"What?" yelled the Spaniard, in rage, and the big veins on his forehead swelled out like whip-cords; "he would not dare!"

"Oh, *won't* he? Well, you jes' try him, that's all."

"Enough; I accept the challenge."

"Well, I had an idea you would," Andrews remarked, placidly.

"As the challenged party, I have the choice of time, place and weapons."

"Exactly."

"To-day is Thursday."

"Jes' so."

"I'll meet your principal next Monday; the weapons, swords; the time we will fix hercafter. If you will give me your address, my second will call upon you and make all the necessary arrangements."

"Next Monday! that's some ways off," Andrews remarked.

"I have the right to fix the day, sir, and I shall not waive my right," Estevan said, haughtily.

"Who in thunder wants you to?" exclaimed Andrews.

"I only remarked that it was some ways off. From Thursday to Monday—why, there's time enough to kill half a dozen men, let alone one, in that space."

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Estevan, with a frowning face.

"Oh, nothing—nothing particular," Andrews answered, coolly. "Only this is a terrible country for accidents, and if, by any unforeseen accident, my principal, Rupert Vane, should be prevented from appearing on the ground fixed upon, next Monday, I shall feel myself in duty bound to take his place."

"You mean that I am to fight you?"

"Exactly."

"And if I refuse?"

"I'll do a leetle in the horsewhipping line myself," and a lurking devil appeared in the shrewd blue eyes of the Yankee.

"Hain't I better fight both of you at the same time?" Estevan asked, sneeringly.

"I think that one of us will give you all that you can attend to," Andrews said, dryly.

"There will be no underhand work on my part, sir!" Estevan exclaimed, haughtily.

"Who in thunder said there would be?" cried Andrews, apparently in innocent amazement. "I only spoke of accidents. They're very common round here, I should judge, for only last night an ugly cuss concealed behind a bush pulled a trigger on my principal, and if the powder hadn't flashed in the pan, he'd have gone to kingdom come afore you could have said 'flapjacks.'"

Estevan bit his lip, but answered not. He understood the allusion.

"Your friend will find me at the house of Senor Garcia, the merchant."

"Very well; he will wait upon you there, to make all necessary arrangements."

"Good-morning, sir," and Andrews retired.

"I declare to goodness! I wish I knew whether I ought to have thrown him out of the window or not," he muttered, as he descended the stairs.

Estevan, after the departure of his visitor, sat down, and resting his head on his hand, his arm on the window-sill, gazed vacantly out of the window. His brows were compressed in thought.

"Obstacle after obstacle seems to gather in my path," he muttered. "On Monday I am to meet this man. I doubt if he will ever live to see that Monday's light. His friend, too, this cool and calculating Yankee, must bear him company on that dark road that leads to death. No foolish scruples must shake my resolution. They must die that I may live. The die is cast; their fates sealed."

Then the Spaniard rose and paced the room, restlessly.

"I am ill at ease," he exclaimed, impatiently. "I must shake off these gloomy thoughts. I have it. I'll call upon Nanon. I have her address. There is one heart at least in the world that loves me. Poor girl, she would die for my sake; freely give her own life to save mine. How strange it is that I cannot return her passion! Once I did love her, but the spell is over now. The blue eyes of Isabel have banished the black ones of Nanon. I must feign the love, since it is not in my heart."

Estevan, donning his hat, proceeded to the address given him by Nanon.

He found the house to be a small inn on a by-street.

The Spaniard was shown at once to the apartment of the lady.

Nanon was alone.

Clad in simple white, she looked ten times more beautiful than when in the showy ball-dress of the evening before.

The girl rose to receive her visitor, the joyous light sparkling in her eyes.

The door had hardly closed behind the servant, ere Nanon threw herself into the arms of Estevan.

Love was the strongest passion in Nanon's nature.

"You are come and I am happy!" she cried, sinking her head on his breast.

"You are glad to see me, then?" Estevan asked, kissing her white forehead.

"Can you ask that question?" she said, reproachfully.

"I should not ask it, I know," he replied; "one look in your face and there I read, joy."

"Yes, joy at sight of you."

Then he led her to the rude settee that stood by the window, and there they sat; she twining her soft white arms around him as if she feared that some evil fortune might tear him suddenly from her side.

"And you have come from Orleans expressly to see me?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, a look of surprise appearing on her face. "What other reason could bring me to Pensacola? Estevan, I can not live away from you. Your face is to me what the sun is to the earth; banish it and all is gloom. I can not live away from you."

"Suppose that I should die?"

"I should not long survive you," she said, mournfully.

"Nanon, I feel that I do not love you as you deserve to be loved," he said, regretfully.

"But you may, in time," she cried, quickly.

"Nanon, there is a great peril before me."

"Peril?"

"Yes, on Monday next I am to meet a foe in a duel. It will end only in the death of one or both of us," he said, gravely.

"Who is your foe?" Nanon asked, with a pale face.

"An American called Rupert Vane. His second, one Andrews, bore me his challenge to-day. I accepted it for Monday, and named swords as the weapons. I shall select some officer of the garrison as a second, and send him on Saturday to arrange the place and time of meeting."

"Who is this Rupert Vane, and why does he seek your life?"

"He is an American, the guest of Senor Garcia, the merchant. Who or what he is, or what brings him to Pensacola, I can not guess. From his appearance I should judge that at some former time he has followed the sea."

"But the cause of the quarrel?" she asked.

"He believed that by means of a hired bravo I attempted his life last night."

"Why should you wish his life?"

"Ay, why, indeed?" said Estevan, with assumed earnestness; "'tis an idea of his. Some of these Americans are terribly hot-headed, despite their cold natures."

"But you will conquer him!" she cried.

"I'll try to!" he replied.

"You must not die, but live for love and me."

"What power on earth like a true woman's love?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEETING IN THE FOREST.

IN a little glade in the forest, sheltered from the hot beams of the sun, the young sailor, Rupert Vane, waited.

Twenty paces to the right, the rays of the day-god glinted down through the leafy tree-tops upon the black waters of the bayou.

Eagerly, the young sailor looked through the dim aisles of the forest that led to Pensacola.

"Can any thing have happened to detain her?" he murmured, an accent of impatience in his voice. "Can this Spanish rival of mine have learned by any means, that she was to meet me this afternoon? It is hardly possible. I am in a fever of impatience. Minutes seem like hours."

Nervously, Rupert paced up and down the forest glade.

As he waited, chafing at the delay, there came to his watchful ear, the sound of a light step hastening toward him. His face brightened up.

"It is she!" he murmured.

The guess of the sailor was right, for, with a step as light and elastic as the bounding fawn, Isabel came through the wood.

A glad smile lit up her face as she beheld the manly form of her lover.

In another moment she was in his arms.

"Pardon me if I kept you waiting," she said. "I fear that I have been followed!"

"Followed!" exclaimed Rupert, and an angry fire lighted up his dark eyes.

"Yes, as I came from the house, I noticed that one of the soldiers of the garrison was loitering about the door. I thought not of it at the moment as being any thing unusual; but, as I left the city, I chanced to glance back. You can judge of my alarm when I saw that the soldier was walking along, slowly, behind me. For a moment I halted. The soldier perceived that I had noticed him, and, with a careless air, he turned into a little wine-shop that was close by. I hastened on, ever and anon keeping a watchful look behind me."

"And did you see him again?"

"No, yet shortly after I entered the forest I fancied that a dark form was dogging my footsteps. I hastened onward, hoping by flight to baffle the pursuit."

"It would not be well for this fellow if I caught him," said Rupert, sternly.

"I think that I have evaded him."

"But who can have put a spy upon your footsteps?"

"The man that would rival you in my love."

"You mean the son of the commandante, Captain Estevan?"

"Yes."

"Does he think to win your love by making himself hateful to you?" Rupert asked.

"I am rich—an heiress. That is the reason why he seeks my hand. From the servants I have heard many strange tales of his wild and lawless acts. I have learned to loathe his very presence," Isabel replied, with a shudder.

"I bear ill will to none in the world," Rupert said, slowly; "but, Isabel, I will not yield you to mortal man, even though he were one of the princes of the earth. In the sight of Heaven you are my plighted wife. Soon I shall claim the fulfillment of your vow."

"I am yours whenever you claim me," the girl replied, simply.

"Our happiness will not be long delayed. One short week and I trust that I shall be able to call you mine forever and forever," the lover said, fondly.

"And till that time guard well your life!" exclaimed Isabel, earnestly.

"What danger threatens me?"

"Estevan!"

"And do you think that there is danger to be apprehended from him?"

"Yes; not openly, for his nature is an evil one, I am sure. He will strike you in the dark and secretly."

"I have very little fear," Rupert said, quietly.

"But, for my sake, be careful," the maiden pleaded, looking, with eyes beaming tenderly with love, into the dark face of the sailor.

"For thy sake I'll guard my life as though it were a precious jewel. Hitherto I have dared death undauntedly, but, in the future, I will be as careful as though my existence was a fragile glass that might be shattered by a touch."

With a long, sweet kiss, Isabel repaid the promise.

"And now we must arrange some method by which we can communicate with each other," Rupert said.

"I have thought of a plan!" Isabel exclaimed, quickly.

"I have a black, named Geno, whom I am sure that I can trust. He can reach you unobserved. No one will suspect that he is our confidant."

"The plan is an excellent one. I am stopping at the house of Senor Garcia, the merchant."

"Yes; I know it well," Isabel said.

"There your messenger can find me."

"And now I must return. I may not stay too long away, else my absence will be noticed and suspicions aroused. Do you love me as well as ever?" and Isabel looked, smilingly, into Rupert's face.

"Can you doubt it?" he exclaimed, passionately. "Ah! Isabel, you are dearer to me than even life itself. Your love creates for me a heaven on earth. Should I lose you, all would be gloom and despair."

"You do love me!" Isabel said, in a tone of conviction.

"You believe that I do?"

"Yes, and I like to hear you say it," she replied, frankly.

"Oh! I shall count the hours until you are mine."

"And I the minutes!"

"You will send to me soon?"

"Yes, and steal forth to meet you if I can."

"When?" asked Rupert, eagerly.

"Perhaps to-night," Isabel replied, after thinking for a moment. "You know the broad plaza that looks toward the sea?"

"Yes."

"After vespers I will try to avoid observation and meet you there; till then, farewell."

"Shall I not accompany you through the forest?" he asked.

"It is better that you should not. This soldier, who I think is watching me, may be concealed somewhere in the bushes. If he should see us together, my object in walking this way would be easily guessed. But, if you are not seen with me, no one can tell but what I have sought the forest for the amusement of the walk."

"You will think of me sometimes in the long hours that must intervene ere we meet again?" Rupert pleaded.

"Think of you!" cried Isabel, softly, clinging to the manly bosom of her lover. "Oh, Rupert, you are ever in my thoughts, and have been for many a year. Yes, ever since you saved my life on this very spot. See, yonder is the tree to the limb of which the panther hung. It is years since that terrible scene, yet when I close my eyes even now, it all returns with startling earnestness. Why should I not give myself to you? You saved my life; it is yours, then, by right."

"And I shall claim it."

Again Rupert drew the light form of the blushing maid to his heart, touched the full, red lips so rich in their precious sweetness, and then, with a heart full of joy, and a smile upon her lovely face, that made her look more like an angel than ever, Isabel hastened away.

Rupert watched her until she was lost to sight amid the tree-trunks.

"What would not a man dare to win the love of such a jewel of a girl!" he exclaimed, his eyes kindling with passion.

Then a rustling in the bushes attracted the attention of the young sailor.

Suspensions of another ambushade flashed through his mind. With a motion quick as thought, he thrust his hand into his bosom and grasped the loaded pistol that he carried there.

From the covert of the bushes, from whence the noise had proceeded, rose the tall figure of an Indian chief. He was an aged warrior, stern and grim-visaged.

He extended his hand toward the young man, for his keen eye had noted the warlike preparation.

"Me friend," he said, laconically.

Rupert removed his hand from the butt of the pistol. He saw nothing hostile in the face of the savage.

"Red-face—pale chief?" said the Indian, in a tone of question.

"Yes, I am a pale chief," Rupert replied.

"My brother lives yonder?" and the savage pointed to Pensacola.

"No, I am a stranger here," and then a sudden thought occurred to him. "Is the red chief an Appalachee warrior?"

Gravely the savage shook his head.

"What tribe is my brother?"

"The Natchez live by the big river that rolls ever onward to the great salt lake. One wigwam in the village of the red braves is empty. The chiefs of the Natchez wait for the return of a warrior who has journeyed to where the great ball of fire comes out of the earth. The-snake-with-three-tails is a great chief. Scalps hang thick in his wigwam."

Rupert gathered from the speech of the Indian that he was a chief of the Natchez tribe and called "The-snake-with-three-tails."

"Why does the red chief hide in the bushes and watch?" Rupert asked.

"The eyes of the chief are old—dim with the weight of many sleeps—yet when he looks upon the face of his white brother, whose skin has been kissed by the great sun, he sees that the blood of the Indian runs in his veins," said the warrior, with a stolid face.

Rupert started in astonishment. He guessed that, like a specter from the tomb, the aged chief had risen, uncalled, to reveal to him the secret of his birth.

"Chief, I know not whether I am white or red, or a mixture of both. My birth and parentage are both mysteries to me. Even now I seek among the warriors of the Appalachee nation some aged chief to penetrate if I can the secrets of my early life."

"The Appalachee nation?" questioned the Indian.

"Yes; something tells me that they can reveal to me all that I wish to know. I am sure that the blood of the Indian is in my veins. From early boyhood all have called me Red Rupert."

"Face red," said the chief, as if in explanation.

"Yes; that is the reason."

"Many moons ago a singing-bird dwelt in the lodges of the Appalachees; Lupah was the flower of her tribe," said the Indian, slowly.

"Lupah," murmured Rupert, with a thoughtful air, and he passed his hand with a vacant look across his forehead, as though old memories had been aroused by the name. "Lupah," he murmured again. "Strange how familiar that name is to me, and yet I do not remember to have ever heard it before."

"The singing-bird sung in the lodge of a chief. She bore him a son. The chief had a bad heart; it was rotten like the hollow oak in which the bear makes his wigwam. He left the singing-bird and sought a home afar. She died, and the wild-flowers grow over her grave, none as fair as the flower that sleeps beneath the earth."

A vague suspicion passed through the mind of Rupert. Earnestly he gazed upon the features of the aged chief, and strove to bring back to his mind the scenes of early years. The effort was useless; memory was a blank.

"Chief, know you aught of my birth?" Rupert asked, anxiously.

"When the time comes, the chief of the Natchez will speak," replied the savage, ambiguously. "Let the eyes of the white-skin, who has the face of the Indian, be sharp as the eyes of the hawk. Snakes are in his path. The white squaw was followed from the big lodges by a snake who hid in the bushes. Good-by." And, as suddenly as he had come, the chief disappeared in the thicket. Rupert remained transfixed with amazement.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECOND OF DON ESTEVAN.

RUPERT gazed after the chief in wonder.

"Yon savage holds the clue to unravel the mystery that surrounds me," he murmured. "I am sure of it. When the time comes, he will speak; but when will the time come?"

The sigh of the breeze rustling the leaves of the pines alone answered the question.

Slowly the young sailor walked back toward the town.

Arriving at the house of the merchant Garcia, whose guest the sailor was, he found Andrews at the door awaiting him.

"Hello, I've been on the look-out for you!" the Yankee exclaimed.

"Has anything happened?" asked Rupert, who guessed from the manner of the other that he had something of importance to communicate.

"There's a visitor inside, waiting to see you."

"To see me?" questioned Rupert, in astonishment; for with the exception of Senor Garcia, he knew not a man in the city.

"Yes; he's been here nearly an hour. I told him that you were out, but he said that his business was particular; that he *must* see you, and he would wait."

"What is he like?" asked the sailor, who couldn't understand who his strange visitor could be, or guess on what errand he came.

"He's a young stripling about nineteen, I should judge."

"Perhaps he is the bearer of a message from this Spanish captain, Estevan," Rupert suggested.

"Well, I don't think that that is likely. He's nothing but a boy. The Spaniard would be likely to select one of his brother-officers to act as his second. Besides, the second of the captain will want to see me, and not you."

"Yes, that is very true," Rupert said, thoughtfully.

"I thought it might be possible that he brought some message from Miss Isabel," Andrews remarked, with a sly glance at Rupert's face.

"That is not possible, for I have just parted from Isabel. She met me by stealth not two hours ago in the forest," Rupert said, quietly.

"I can't guess, then, what in thunder the critter does want!" Andrews exclaimed, perplexed.

"I'll soon find out."

Conducted by Andrews, Rupert entered the house.

The stranger rose and bowed gracefully as the two came into the room wherein he was seated.

Rupert beheld a slender, boyish figure, attired like a gentleman, in a costly, well-fitting garb of black. The face of the youth was as fair as the face of a woman, and was lit up by a pair of dark, lustrous eyes.

The sailor saw at a glance that he looked upon the face of a stranger.

"You wish to see me, senor?" he asked.

"You are the Senor Rupert?" the stripling said, in a clear, musical voice.

"At your service, sir," Rupert replied, bowing.

"Allow me to introduce myself," said the youth. "I am called Ferdinand Capello. I have come on behalf of Captain Estevan Alvarado."

Rupert and Andrews exchanged a look of astonishment.

"Why didn't you say what your business was at the first on't?" asked Andrews, a trace of indignation in his tones. "I act as the friend of Senor Vane. It wasn't necessary that you should see him. I could have arranged everything with you."

"Your pardon, senor!" exclaimed the youth, politely.

"I thought it best that I should see the Senor Vane in person. What I have to say is very important, and is, probably, quite unexpected by both of you gentlemen."

Again Rupert and Andrews looked at each other in amazement.

The same thought occurred to both on the instant. The Spanish captain did not intend to fight.

"If your mission here is to seek to postpone, or to avoid this hostile meeting altogether, I can tell you at once, sir, that your mission will fail. Don Estevan either meets me, or I'll brand him as a coward before all men," said Rupert, sternly.

A glance of fire shot from the dark eyes of the youth. He raised his hand as if to stay the sailor in his speech.

"Your pardon, senor!" he cried, hastily; "you jump too quickly to conclusions. Not one drop of coward blood flows in the veins of Don Estevan Alvarado. My errand here is not to postpone but to hasten the meeting between yourself and my principal."

The two Americans were more astonished by this speech than even at the previous words of the young stranger.

"The sooner the meeting comes, the better I shall be pleased," responded Rupert, curtly.

"Will to-night suit the senor?"

"To-night!" exclaimed Andrews, in utter astonishment.

"Yes, to-night," repeated the youth.

"Well, this is 'tarnal sudden!" ejaculated Andrews.

"From the words of Senor Rupert, I should judge that the change would be agreeable to him," said the youth, dryly.

"It is," replied Rupert, quickly; "as well to-night as at any other time."

"At what hour?" asked Andrews, into whose mind a dim suspicion had crept.

"At ten," said the stranger. "By that hour the moon will be up and afford sufficient light for the encounter. Does the hour suit?"

"Perfectly," Rupert replied.

"And the place?" Andrews asked.

"A glade in the woods by the bayou. I can not very well describe the place, but I will come at half-past nine and conduct you to it."

"I must speak with Senor Rupert alone for a minute before you can receive your answer," Andrews said, quickly, as if with the intent of preventing Rupert from speaking.

"As you please, senor; I can wait," the youth said.

"Excuse us for a few moments," Andrews said.

The youth politely bowed assent.

Andrews and Rupert withdrew into an adjoining apartment.

The Yankee carefully closed the door behind him.

Rupert observed the cautious action of the other with a quiet smile.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Andrews.

"That this Spaniard is afraid that delay will cool his courage, and wishes to have the matter settled at once," Rupert replied.

"That's your idea, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, it ain't mine," Andrews said, with a dubious shake of the head.

"What do you think?"

"I fear treachery," was Andrews' significant answer.

"From this Spanish captain?"

"Exactly! I've got the idea into my head that he doesn't dare to meet you in fair fight, and has laid another scheme to entrap you."

"But, how can that be possible?" asked Rupert, an angry frown gathering upon his face at the bare idea.

"Easy enough. This boy—for he isn't anything more—proposes that you meet the Spaniard in some spot in the forest at ten to-night. He doesn't name the exact place, but says that he will conduct you there. Now, this doesn't look right. Why does the Spaniard send this boy instead of one of his brother officers? Surely a fellow that is going to fight for his life would rather choose a man to act as his second than a stripling not yet out of his teens, like this boy."

"There is reason in what you say," Rupert observed, thoughtfully.

"Of course!" exclaimed Andrews, quickly. "This darned cuss has attempted your life once, why shouldn't he try it on again? The second time may succeed, even if the first failed."

"You think, then, that the plan is to waylay us as we proceed through the forest?"

"That's the ticket. The 'tarnal critter can put us out of the way quietly, and who will be the wiser for it?"

"How shall I avoid the snare—if it be a snare?"

"Don't go alone; take Senor Garcia and some of his friends with you," suggested Andrews.

"Your idea is a good one. I will follow your advice. I do not wish to give this cur of a captain the chance to say that I hesitated to meet him," Rupert said, a look of anger shining in his dark eyes.

"Course not! Sakes alive! that wouldn't do!" Andrews cried, quickly.

"The captain may object to the presence of my friends," suggested Rupert.

"Let him! Who cares?" exclaimed Andrews, defiantly.

"If he objects, it's because he don't mean that you shall have fair play. Just you let me talk to this young man. I'll straighten things out, or my name ain't Decius Andrews."

"Old friend, I'll place myself entirely in your hands," Rupert said, taking the horny palm of the Yankee between his own.

"I'll bring him up with a round turn, see if I don't!"

The two then re-entered the apartment where sat the young stripling, who claimed to be the second of the Spanish captain.

The youth rose at their approach and waited silently, as if to hear the decision that the twain had arrived at.

"Return to your principal and tell him that the time and place suit. I suppose that there will be no objection to a few friends of ours witnessing the duel?" Andrews said, his keen eye fixed intently on the face of the youth as he spoke.

"Friends?" asked the stripling, inquiringly.

"Yes; for instance, Senor Garcia and—"

"I do not see that there can be any objection to the presence of your friends," interrupted the youth.

Andrews was astonished.

He had expected that there would be a decided objection to the presence of witnesses. The keen wits of the Yankee were at fault.

"No objection?" he stammered.

"None in the world that I can think of," replied the youth, politely.

Andrews looked at Rupert, dumbfounded. His guess wrong, he had nothing more to say.

"It is understood, then?" continued the youth.

"At ten to-night," Rupert cried.

"Exactly. I will come for the senor at half-past nine. The weapons, swords; we will provide them. Until then, I bid you adieu."

With a polite bow, the youth departed.

"What do you think now?" asked Rupert.

"I don't know what to think," replied Andrews, a blank look upon his rugged features.

"He can not mean treachery or he would object to the presence of our friends."

"There is something wrong about it; I'm sure there is!" cried Andrews, decidedly.

"To-night will solve the mystery," Rupert said.

The youth who had borne Don Estevan's message descended into the street.

As his foot touched the pavement, a tall stranger passing caught a glimpse of his face.

The stranger started and caught the youth by the arm.

Turning, a cry burst from the lips of the stripling as he gazed upon the features of the stranger.

"You here!" exclaimed the man, in astonishment.

"Hush! do not betray me!" the youth cried, in terror.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE Spanish captain, Estevan, was pacing up and down the narrow limits of his quarters with a restless motion, like unto the captive tiger.

Ever and anon he glanced out of the window that commanded a view of the street and the broad bay in the distance, as if he expected some one, and was watching for their approach.

"By the Virgin! but she makes a long stay!" he muttered, pulling the long ends of his mustache, reflectively. "If Roque fulfills his task, I shall know the truth. The thought of her meeting this American in secret maddens me. The girl has a will of her own. I am afraid that I shall find it a difficult matter to bend her to my purpose. I'll make the attempt, though all the fiends below stand in my way and bid me stop."

And as the Spaniard looked from the window, with frowning brow, he saw the girlish form of Isabel coming down the street.

"She's returning," he muttered, as he gazed from the open casement; "but, where is Roque? Curse the fellow! I'd wager that he's asleep in some wine-house. I was a fool to trust him."

With a light step and a joyous face, Isabel passed on, unconscious of the angry eyes that watched her from the window.

Thoughts of her sailor lover, Red Rupert, were in her mind; love for him filled her young heart. The future looked bright and beautiful. She thought not of danger, only of the minutes, so full of sweet joy, that had passed

quickly away, while she stood by her lover's side and looked with blushing tenderness into his dark eyes.

The form of the girl disappeared around the angle of the wall.

The sunlight seemed less bright to the eyes of Estevan when the graceful figure and smiling face of Isabel faded from his sight.

"I have never loved woman in all my life as I love this girl," he muttered. "The passion that fills my heart is maddening in its intensity. Perhaps the flame is so fierce that it will not be a lasting one. Well, time will tell. Where can that scoundrel Roque be?"

And even with the thought, the skulking figure of the soldier appeared upon the scene.

From the unsteady step of his spy, the captain guessed at once that he was under the influence of liquor.

"The drunken rascal!" Estevan muttered, in a rage. "I'll have him tied up to the halberts, and give him a dozen lashes some fine morning."

Then Roque, gazing about with a look of owl-like gravity upon his flushed features, beheld the face of his officer looking down upon him from the window.

A beaming smile came over the soldier's face. With an air of drunken dignity he saluted the captain and took his uncertain way to the door of the house.

"Idiot that I was to trust this drunken fool to watch Isabel!" Estevan exclaimed, in disgust. "I'll wager that he has been asleep in some den, and now comes with a lie to plead as an excuse for his failure."

A knock at the door interrupted Estevan's musing.

"Come in," he said, impatiently.

The door opened and Roque entered.

"So you have come at last!" the captain said, angrily.

"Yes, senor," replied Roque, saluting.

"And drunk, as usual!"

"What, senor captain! I drunk!" exclaimed the soldier, in a tone of injured innocence. "Ah, senor! how can you say such a thing? May my next drink be my poison if I have tasted wine since yesternight."

"Bah!" cried Estevan, in contempt; "your face is flushed and your legs unsteady—"

"The effect of the heat, senor captain!" cried Roque, interrupting his officer.

"The heat!" exclaimed Estevan, contemptuously.

"Yes, senor, it is terrible hot," protested the soldier.

"Ah, captain, do you think for a moment that I would wrong a noble senor, like yourself, by making a beast of myself when employed on your business? Never! I have too much honor."

"Honor!" cried Estevan, in scorn.

"Yes, senor, I am the very soul of honor!" and Roque thumped his breast vigorously.

"Enough. Did you follow the Senorita Isabel?" asked Estevan, impatiently.

"Like the wolf follows his prey!" replied the soldier, loftily.

"Where did she go?"

"To the forest that fringes the bay to the north," the soldier replied.

"And did she meet this American there?" asked Estevan, anxiously, a frown upon his face.

"I can not say, senor," replied Roque.

"How? Did you not say that you followed her?"

"Yes, senor, to the forest."

"And within the forest you lost trace of her?" cried Estevan, guessing at the truth.

"Exactly, senor."

"Scoundrel, did you not swear that you would keep close watch upon her?" demanded the captain, in anger.

"Yes, senor, but it was not my fault! Hear my story, then blame me if you can!" cried Roque, with outstretched arms.

"Speak, then!" said Estevan, impatiently, a look of contempt upon his face.

"Listen, senor; it is a wonderful story!" exclaimed the soldier, impressively.

"A wonderful lie, more likely!"

"Oh, senor, you wound me by such doubts!" and Roque looked pathetic. "May I die of drinking too much cold water if I speak not the truth."

"Go on, then."

"Obedient to your orders, I watched the Senorita Isabel leave the mansion of your father. Then I followed at a safe distance in the rear. The senorita walked along slowly un-

til she left the city; then she quickened her steps. Just as I reached the edge of the town—just by the last house—the *senorita* turned round suddenly.”

“She discovered you, then?”

“Yes, *senor*; but who could have guessed that she would turn round?” asked the soldier, plaintively.

“And so, being discovered, you did not follow her into the wood?”

“Oh, but I did, *senor*!” cried the soldier. “By the Mass, I was not such a fool as to let the *senorita* see that I knew that she had seen me, for, just as she turned, I went into the house, that happened, luckily, to be a wine-shop. How could the *senorita* tell that I was following her? I went into the wine-house and watched the *senorita* from the latticed window until she entered the wood; then I followed her again.”

“It was while you were waiting in the wine-shop that you got drunk, eh?” Estevan asked.

“Oh, no, *senor*!” cried Roque, in a tone that showed that his feelings were wounded at the supposition. “I was there but for a few minutes, only time to drink one bottle, and I never get drunk under ten bottles.”

“Rascal! will you swear that you only drank one?”

“Yes, *senor*! Swear by all the saints in the calendar!” cried Roque, stoutly. “I only had money enough to pay for one bottle, and the shabby scoundrel who kept the wine-house refused to trust me for a second.”

“How can I believe your words, when you swore to me only a moment ago that you had not tasted a drop of wine since yesternight?” demanded Estevan.

“For my own pleasure, I meant, *senor*,” replied Roque, unblushingly. “It is the truth; I swear to it! The bottle of wine that I drank in the wine-shop was drank solely for business.”

“How do you prove that?”

“Did I not seek refuge in the man’s shop, when the *senorita* turned round? *Voto a brios!* what else could I do but take a bottle of wine?” and Roque smiled benignantly as he put the question.

“Roque, thou shouldst have been a lawyer, not a soldier,” said Estevan, with a sarcastic smile; “the black gown would have become you better than the laced coat of the musketeer. But go on with your story.”

The soldier grinned and bowed at the compliment.

“The *senorita* entered the wood; I followed; but, as it was some distance from the wine-house to the edge of the forest, I lost sight of the *senorita*, and when I entered the wood I could see no trace of her,” the soldier said.

“What did you do then?”

“Guessed at the path she had taken,” replied Roque, with a knowing grin. “It was not difficult to do, for there was but one path. It was not likely that the *senorita* would for sake the beaten path and tear her dress with the brambles in the openings.”

“You followed the path?”

“Yes, *senor*.”

“But you told me but now that you lost her in the forest?”

“And so I did. Now comes the wonderful part of my story. I pressed forward as fast as my legs would carry me, running as noiselessly as a fox. Of course I kept a sharp look-out ahead for the young lady. Then, as I proceeded through the forest, I suddenly discovered that something was following me in the bushes that shut in the path.”

“Following you?” questioned Estevan, in no little astonishment.

“Yes, *senor*,” the soldier replied. “I was following the *senorita*, and something hid by the bushes was following me. By the beard of my grandfather! my very hair stood on end when I discovered it.”

“It was but your imagination!” cried Estevan, in contempt.

“No, *senor*!” exclaimed Roque, stoutly; “it was reality. When I went on, the thing—whatever it was, beast or human—followed me. When I stopped, it stopped also.”

“And did you not try to discover what it was?”

“Yes, *senor*; after I discovered that I was followed, I drew my knife and plunged into the bushes in the direction from whence the noise of the footsteps had come.”

“And what did you find?”

“Nothing,” replied Roque, with a grin; “the thing retreated from me as fast as I advanced, keeping always about the same distance from me. Growing tired at last of following this will-o’-the-wisp, I turned and retraced my steps; and

as fast as I went back, just so fast the thing followed. When I discovered this, it made the blood run chill in my veins. I began to think that it was an imp of Satan that was so persistently dogging my footsteps. I never feared mortal man, but I have too much regard for my soul to attempt to fight the devil. So when I reached the path I took to my heels and ran back toward the city as fast as I could go.”

“And you heard no more of the thing that was following you?”

“Yes, *senor*, I did. The thing ran after me through the bushes, keeping always at the same distance behind me, but when I left the wood and gained the open plain, the noise of the footsteps ceased as if by magic.”

Estevan was puzzled by the strange tale told by the soldier. He was half inclined to believe that it was all a ruse, and yet he could not see what object Roque had in telling a falsehood. Though the soldier was both a drunkard and a boaster, yet he was no coward; not a man likely to be frightened by a shadow.

“Where have you kept yourself all this time?” Estevan asked.

“I went back to the wine-house and watched for the return of the *senorita*. I thought that, if she met this American gallant in the wood, he might walk back with her to the town.”

“But she returned alone?”

“Yes, *senor*.”

Estevan remained silent, apparently in deep thought.

“The gold-pieces that you promised, captain?” Roque said, anxiously watching the face of his officer.

“You shall receive them,” Estevan replied.

“Thanks, noble captain,” and the soldier withdrew.

“I must see Isabel at once,” Estevan said, moodily.

CHAPTER XIV.

ESTEVAN DECLARES HIS LOVE.

THE Spanish officer walked slowly toward the house of the commandante.

A dark look was upon his face. It was evident that his thoughts were far from being pleasant ones.

“I must have an understanding with Isabel at once,” he muttered. “I will let her see that I know of this foolish passion she has for the American. I am sure that she met him in the forest, this afternoon. The spy that dogged Roque’s footsteps was probably some friend of the American, whom he had placed on the watch to prevent any one from interrupting his meeting with the girl. If my hand has not lost its cunning, I’ll send this red-skinned American to the devil ere he is many days older. The heretic will be at home there. And as for Isabel, she shall know that I am not so easily deceived.”

As Estevan approached the house, he saw the black, Geno, stretched out at full length in the sun.

“Where is your mistress?” the Spaniard asked.

“Up dar, sar,” and the black pointed to the curtained window that looked from the second story of the mansion upon the fragrant garden.

Estevan proceeded at once to Isabel’s room, knocked lightly at the door and heard the clear voice of the girl bid him enter.

Obeys the command on the instant, Estevan entered the apartment.

Isabel was seated by the window that looked into the garden on the side of the house.

“Has the *senorita* entirely recovered from the fatigue of last night’s ball?” the Spaniard asked, taking a chair and seating himself by the side of the girl as he spoke.

“Oh, yes,” Isabel answered, slowly. She felt ill at ease in the presence of the Spanish captain. There was an awkward coldness in her manner that she could not shake off, though she strove with all her power to appear unconcerned.

“Allow me to compliment you upon your appearance last night. You were the belle of the evening. My heart swelled with pride when I looked upon your loveliness, and the thought came to me that, some day, you might make me the proud master of those charms.”

Isabel cast down her eyes, and a shade passed over her

face. She felt that an unpleasant scene was about to occur.

"Isabel, I have never openly told you that I loved you, but you must have guessed the truth from a thousand little acts, for I have not attempted to conceal the passion with which you have inspired me," Estevan said, softly, taking the hand of the maiden within his own as he spoke.

Cold as ice, and motionless as pulseless marble, the little white hand of Isabel lay in the grasp of the Spaniard.

"Senor, I—" Isabel stammered, with downcast eyes. She knew not how to speak the truth that she felt must be told.

"May I accept this hesitation as a proof that the avowal of my love is not distasteful to you?" Estevan asked.

With a desperate effort, Isabel spoke.

"Senor, I regret that I must speak words that may give you pain, but the truth must be told: I feel that I can never love you."

Estevan bit his lip. Isabel felt the quick throb of anger that surged through his veins in the iron-like pressure of the hand that held her own a prisoner.

"Do I understand your meaning aright?" he said, slowly; "you refuse the love I offer?"

"I can not help it, senor," Isabel replied. "If Heaven has not put the love in my heart, is it my fault?"

"And yet you told my father that you would be my wife?"

"No, no, senor, no!" Isabel exclaimed, quickly. "Your father asked me if my heart was free. I replied that I did not love any Pensacola gentleman. He then told me how much it would please him if I could find it in my heart to love you and become your wife. I did not wish to pain him by telling him the truth, and so foolishly held my tongue, and thus led him into error. For, even at the time when he spoke, I knew that it was impossible for me ever to love you as a wife should love her husband."

"Why impossible?" Estevan asked, his face calm, only a ripple of passion in his dark eyes.

"I can hardly tell the reason," Isabel said, in confusion. "I felt that I did not love you, and I did not deem it possible that I ever would love you."

"And you can not tell the reason why you do not and can not love me?" the Spaniard asked, coldly.

"Why ask me, a woman, for reasons?" Isabel said, evading the question. "It is my sex's privilege to act without reason."

"And yet you do not!" exclaimed Estevan, his lips curling in scorn.

The hot blush swept over Isabel's features. She guessed from the tone used by the Spaniard, as well as from his words, that her secret was either discovered or suspected.

"You do not answer," Estevan said, slowly, finding that she did not speak. "Isabel, although perhaps you have not spoken falsely, yet you have deceived both my father and myself."

"I deceive?" Isabel murmured, her cheeks still burning, and her eyes still bent upon the ground.

"Yes. When my father asked if your heart was free, you answered that you did not love any gentleman of Pensacola."

"Which was the truth," the girl said, raising her soft blue eyes to the face of the Spaniard.

"Yes; but you did not tell him that you did love a stranger—an American!" exclaimed Estevan, anger in his voice.

Again Isabel's eyes sought the floor. As she had suspected, her secret was known.

"You do not answer. Your silence confirms my words," the Spaniard said, with bitter accent.

"I neither deny nor confirm," Isabel said, slowly.

"If you did deny it you would be speaking falsely. I know that you love—or think that you love—this stranger, Rupert Vane. I know that you have met him secretly in the forest to-day. You dare not deny that I have spoken the truth!"

Isabel was thunderstruck. How the captain could know of her meeting with her lover in the forest passed her comprehension. The tone of Estevan, too, wounded her pride. A little hectic spot began to burn in either cheek. Mild, loving woman as she was, yet the fire of Spanish blood burned in her veins.

"Senor, you are not my guardian," she said, firmly; "I have no account to render you in this matter. If your father chooses to question me, to him I will explain all my actions and give my reason for what I have done."

"You think that you love this vagabond stranger?" cried

Estevan, fiercely. The composure of the girl irritated him almost to madness.

"Senor, you forget yourself!" exclaimed Isabel, rising to her feet; "you forget to whom you speak!"

"No, I do not!" replied Estevan, scornfully. "I am speaking to a foolish girl who does not know what she is doing—what acts of folly she is committing. But I will save you from this base adventurer in spite of yourself. You shall not walk blindfold to ruin, if my hand can keep you from it."

"I can not longer listen to such language!" exclaimed Isabel, impatiently. "Shall I leave the room, or will you?"

Estevan gazed at the angry girl for a moment in silence, the fire flashing from his dark eyes; then he turned upon his heel, and, without a word, strode out of the room.

The anger of the Spaniard was so great that he did not dare to trust himself to speak.

Isabel watched the door close behind the rejected suitor, and then, with a sigh of relief, sunk again into her seat.

"I feared this," she murmured, with downcast eyes. "I feared lest they should discover my love for Rupert, but I did not dream that my secret meeting with him in the forest would be revealed. This terrible man must have employed some one to watch me." Then a sudden thought occurred to her. "Oh! I remember now," she said, quickly; "the soldier who went into the wine-house. I guessed at the time that he was a spy upon my actions. He must have followed me into the wood, and concealed by the bushes, have watched my meeting with Rupert."

Then, for a few moments Isabel was silent; her brain busy in thought. "I must steal forth to-night and see Rupert, at all hazards," she said, firmly, and with evident determination. "He must know that the secret of our love is known to the man who should be the last in the world to know it. It is useless grieving over the past; danger threatens in the future; we must take measures to meet it."

Thoughtfully the fair girl leaned her head upon her hand and tried to devise some plan, by means of which she could steal from the house and meet her lover upon the sea-washed plaza, when the mantle of night covered in the earth. The difficulty was, to think of some plan to elude the watchful eyes that she was sure would be upon her.

Leaving Isabel to her own busy thoughts, we will follow the footsteps of the Spanish captain.

Estevan's brows were dark with rage as he descended the stairs. He ground his teeth together, fiercely.

"By the Mass, she defies me!" he cried, in anger, communing with himself. "She is proud of her love for this cursed American. Perhaps she thinks that his sword is destined to settle my aspirations for her hand, forever. By Heaven! I am impatient for the time to come when I shall face him, steel in hand. If his skill be more than mine, I am content to die. Would that to-morrow were Monday, so that the affair could be settled at once; but no, it is better as it is," he said, thoughtfully. "Between now and Monday much may happen," and as he spoke, a dark look, full of treacherous meaning, passed over his face.

Then Estevan descended into the street.

A brother officer happening to pass at the moment, Estevan accosted him.

"Lieutenant, a moment, please."

The officer, a little swarthy fellow, by name, Cadovo, approached. His reputation was far from being good, as he was noted as a bully and a gamester, besides being one of the most determined duelists in the Spanish service.

"At your service, captain," Cadovo said.

"Lieutenant, I have a favor to ask at your hands."

"Command me."

"I wish you to act as my second in a little affair that I have on hand."

"Certainly—delighted!" The eyes of the lieutenant sparkled with joy. Next to fighting a duel himself, he liked to assist at one.

"Who is the party?"

"Did you notice two strangers at the ball last night?"

"Americans?"

"Yes."

"Friends of Senor Garcia?"

"Yes."

"I saw them. Which one?"

"The shorter of the two; the one whose face is reddened like an Indian's."

"What is the cause of the affair?"

"He looked too long at a lady that I fancy, then took a walk by moonlight, and a man shot at him from behind a bush. He charges that I tried to murder him and has challenged me," Estevan said, in explanation.

"These Americans are so suspicious," the lieutenant exclaimed, with a shrewd smile.

"Yes; come to my quarters and I will explain every thing."

So arm in arm the two proceeded.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW FOE.

ON the broad veranda that surrounded the house of the merchant, sat the two Americans and their host, Senor Garcia.

The moon, sailing high in the heavens, cast its bright light over town and bay.

Garcia examined his watch. Rupert had explained to him the favor that he sought at his hands.

"It is nearly half-past nine," Garcia said, "almost time for your guide to come."

"Do you think that the captain really means to fight?" asked Rupert.

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly," Garcia replied; "he is treacherous, as his attempt on your life proved, but not a coward. Besides, should he refuse to meet you, he would lose what little reputation he possesses. I have no doubt though that if he could find a chance to take your life secretly, he would not hesitate a moment to do so."

"You think that he will meet me."

"Yes; the explanation is easy. You have challenged him; he can not avoid meeting you. He probably relies on his skill in the use of the sword, to remove you from his path."

"But why this haste after expressly stating to Andrews here that he would not meet me until Monday?" Rupert asked.

"Possibly from a wish to get the affair off his mind as quickly as he can. I confess, his haste puzzles me, and I can think of no other reason for it than the one I have given."

"Is he pretty cute with the sword?" Andrews asked.

"Yes, he bears the reputation of being one of the best swordsmen in the Spanish army," Garcia replied.

"I say, cap'n, you'll have to try one of your neat touches on him, like you showed the English officer on the deck of the Bull Dog. I never saw a critter finished so quickly in all my born days. Your sword went through him like a streak of greased lightning."

"You are expert with the sword, then, Senor Rupert?" Garcia asked.

"Yes; when I was quite a lad I learned to handle the weapon," Rupert replied.

"Believe me, you will need all your cunning, for this captain is a master of fence."

"Hello! here's somebody coming up the street!" cried Andrews, hastily.

By the light of the moonbeams they saw a slender figure approaching rapidly.

"Is it our man?" Rupert said, rising.

"I think it is," Andrews replied, after a good look at the approaching stranger. Although the night was warm, he had a cloak wrapped around him.

The youth—for it was the young man that had brought the message of the Spanish captain—bowed as he ascended the steps that led to the veranda.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting, senors," he said, in a frank and open manner.

"A few minutes only," Rupert replied. "Allow me to introduce my friend, Senor Garcia."

The youth bowed.

"The senor will accompany us?" the youth asked.

"Yes."

"You are all ready?"

"Yes."

"Let us set out, then; twenty minutes' walk will bring us to the place of meeting."

"Proceed."

The three followed the messenger of Estevan, left the town behind, and pursued a path by the water, leading to

the forest. Ere long, they came to a little opening in the wood.

By the light of the moonbeams they saw a dark figure, wrapped in a cloak, standing near a tree on the upper edge of the opening.

Andrews nudged Rupert and called his attention to the cloaked figure.

"There he is," the Yankee said, in a whisper.

Garcia looked at the motionless man with a puzzled expression upon his face.

"I do not think that that is the captain," he said, in a guarded tone, to the two Americans. "He is taller than Senor Estevan."

The doubt was soon verified, for, as they advanced, the man in the cloak came toward them, and the three friends saw that they looked upon the face of a stranger.

"The doctor, gentlemen," said the youth.

The stranger bowed, opened his cloak, and displayed the shining blades of two swords.

"Queer instruments for a doctor," muttered Andrews, and, as he spoke, he surveyed the face of the stranger attentively. Then a sudden flash of recognition passed over the shrewd features of the Yankee. "A doctor," he muttered; "if he is, he can take my head for a football. He's more used to giving wounds than curing 'em. I don't understand this a bit."

As Andrews stood a little apart from Garcia and Rupert, his muttered words were unheeded by them.

The youth approached the stranger whom he had introduced as the doctor.

"You are not going to be so mad as to carry out this insane idea?" the man muttered, in an undertone, to the youth.

"I will, though my own life pay the forfeit," he replied, firmly.

"By Heaven! I will not consent to it. I have been as mad as you to allow this to go as far as it has," exclaimed the man, passionately.

"How will you prevent it?" the youth asked, with a quiet smile.

"Three words from me, and the whole mad affair will come to a standstill."

"But you will not speak those three words."

"I will!" cried the stranger, doggedly.

"You will not," replied the youth, in the same quiet tone he had used before, his cool manner forming a strange contrast to the angry passion of the other.

"Who will prevent me from speaking?" questioned the stranger, with a growl.

"I will."

"By Heaven, you will not!" the cloaked man exclaimed. "This madness has gone far enough. I'll save you in spite of yourself."

"How many times shall I tell you that you will not speak; that you will do exactly as I say?" asked the youth, a sad smile on his handsome face.

"I will not!" stubbornly replied the other. "You shall not commit this act of madness. I have the power to prevent it, and I intend to use that power, although you implore me a thousand times to remain quiet. I have been a fool to let you go as far in this affair as you have already gone."

"You forget, then, the oath that you once swore?" And the youth looked the other straight in the eye, the same sad smile playing about his lips.

"The oath," said the "doctor," slowly.

"Yes, the oath that you took without my asking you to take—the oath which hitherto you have sacredly kept, even at the risk of life, but which now you declare you will break."

"And is it not better that I should break it?" he asked, in a sullen way.

"No; and since you will not listen to reason, I must recall your oath to your memory. You have known me since childhood. One day I came to you and said that the time had come for us to part. What answer did you make to me?"

"I knelt to you, as I should to Heaven alone, and begged you not to drive me from you; swore that I would serve you faithfully, protect you from all evil, even give you my life to save you from harm; that your lightest wish should be as law to me. All I asked was that I might serve you and guard you like a faithful dog."

"And you have kept that oath till now."

"I break it to save you."

"And if you do, that instant parts us forever," the youth said, firmly.

"You drive me from you!" cried the strong man, in despair.

"No; blame your own act, not me."

"You would drive away the faithful dog who would lay down his life to save you from harm?" and tears glistened in the dark eyes of the man as he asked the question.

A moment the youth looked into his face, and then silently he extended his hand, which was lithe and white as snow.

The other grasped it with a fervent pressure, and looked imploringly into the face of the youth.

"No, I do not drive away the man who compares himself to a faithful dog, but who is more like a brother, a loving and tender brother, who has borne with all my wayward caprices without a murmur. It is your act, not mine. Baptiste, I solemnly vow to you, as I hope for mercy hereafter, I would rather that you should take one of these weapons and plunge it into my heart than to have you stay me from acting in this matter."

"You would?" and Baptiste—as he was called—looked at the youth with heavy eyes.

"Yes; do you hesitate now?"

"But the danger!" he pleaded.

"Have you not been my instructor?" the youth asked, a confident smile upon his face.

"True, but—"

"You consent; but you growl as you consent."

"I can not help it. You know the reason," he replied, softly.

The eyes of the youth were cast upon the ground for a moment; he was evidently confused.

"Do not speak of that again, Baptiste," the stripling said, slowly, an expression of pain upon his face.

"Forgive me!" said Baptiste, impetuously.

"Yes," and the little hand of the youth pressed the brown hand of the other firmly, for a moment. Then the youth turned to where stood the three friends. They had watched the lengthened conversation with some little astonishment. They supposed, however, the non-arrival of Don Estevan was the cause of it.

The youth advanced toward the three, and Rupert stepped forward to meet him.

"Are you tired of waiting, senor?" asked the youth, politely.

"To speak truth, I am getting somewhat impatient," Rupert replied.

"Senor, it grieves me to confess to you that I have deceived you," said the youth, suddenly.

"Deceived me!" exclaimed Rupert, amazed, while his friends looked at each other in silent wonder.

"Yes, I am not the second of Don Estevan. He knows nothing of this appointment. I stand ready to take his place. You must fight me, senor!" the youth exclaimed.

"Fight you!" Rupert exclaimed, in wonder.

"Well, of all the 'tarnal ideas!" muttered Andrews, aside to Garcia.

"I do not understand it," the Spaniard said to the Yankee, in astonishment.

"This Spanish bully, then, fears to meet the man whose life he has attempted, assassin-like!" exclaimed Rupert, a sneer curling his lips.

"Senor, you wrong the captain!" cried the youth, quickly. "Again I say, he knows nothing of this meeting. It is a device of mine to have you fight me instead of him. Surely it can not matter to you whom you cross swords with."

"You are a boy, no match for me," said Rupert, in contempt.

"Prove that by fighting me!" cried the stripling, fiercely.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DUEL.

"YOUR youth saves you from my sword," Rupert said, calmly. "It is the life of this treacherous Spaniard, Estevan, that I wish, though I am willing to fight all his friends, one by one. I would not deny you the pleasure that you seek, but should you fall by my hand, all would call me a murderer. I can not, as a man of honor, take advantage of your folly."

With flashing eyes and a cheek that burned with passion's fires, the youth listened to the words of the American.

"Listen, senor," he cried; "I swear that you must fight me. If you refuse, it's because you are a coward, and fear to cross swords with me."

"Fear!" exclaimed Rupert, in anger.

"Yes, fear!" the youth repeated, undauntedly. "You must—you shall fight me. If you longer refuse, I'll strike you in the face with the flat of my blade."

A moment the American gazed into the passionate face of the youth. A peculiar gleam shone in the dark eyes of the sailor.

"Your blood be on your own head, then, since you will have it so," Rupert said, quietly. "Gentlemen, you will bear witness that this duel is not of my seeking, but forced upon me by this hot-headed boy. If evil comes to him, let the blame rest where it belongs."

"Choose your weapon, senor; we have had enough of words!" cried the youth, in joy.

The stranger, whom the youth had called Baptiste, advanced and offered the swords for Rupert's inspection. Carelessly the sailor took one; a single glance had told him that there was no difference in the weapons.

Rupert then, doffing his hat and velvet jacket, gave them into the hands of Andrews, who, with Garcia, had stood a little apart, watching the strange scene with wonder.

"The critter seems to be really sp'iling for a fight," said Andrews, as he rolled up Rupert's shirt-sleeve, displaying the firm-knit, muscular right arm of the sailor.

"Yes; I would fain have avoided the quarrel, out of pity for his youth; but since he will fight, whether or no, he must take the consequences of his rashness."

"He's a determined fellow," Garcia said, as he looked upon the stripling.

"Yes," Rupert replied. "I must admire his spirit, although he aims at my life. His friendship for the captain must be great to induce him to risk his life in his service."

"Are you ready, senor?" asked the youth, in his clear voice.

"At your pleasure, sir," Rupert replied, advancing sword in hand toward the youth. Then he paused in astonishment as the stripling confronted him. His opponent had not made the slightest preparation for the fight; not even removed his coat.

"Again you give me the advantage, young sir!" the sailor cried, an expression of anger in his tones. "You have not taken the usual precautions to insure success. By threatening an insult, you have forced me to encounter you. Now I ask you to prepare for the encounter."

"I am prepared," the youth replied, gracefully throwing himself in a position that quickly told the experienced eye of Rupert that his opponent was no novice in the use of the sword.

"As you will!" cried the sailor, impatiently. "I warn you I shall act only on the defensive. I have no wish to stain my sword with your blood, although the shedding of a few drops of it might prove a lesson to you."

"And I warn you that I seek your life, and will use all the art that I am master of to stretch you senseless upon the earth!" cried the stripling, fiercely.

The slender blades twined around each other like two silver snakes gleaming in the moonlight. The contrast between the stalwart form of Red Rupert and the slender figure of the youth was great.

Firm as a rock, the sailor stood and received the attack of his foe. With the fierce dash of the tiger leaping upon its prey, the stripling strove to penetrate the guard of the other. Thrust followed thrust in quick succession. All the wiles of the fencer's art the stripling brought into play. Feint and lunge—lunge and feint—but the iron wrist of the sailor, that combined the strength of the metal and the elasticity of the willow twig, parried the deadly thrusts aimed at his heart, and threw them aside as the rugged rock divides the ocean billow.

Fatigued at last, the youth paused in his attack, and retiring a few paces, leaned upon his sword, breathless with the exertions that he had made.

Rupert dropped the point of his rapier until the keen edge of the polished blade sunk into the soft loam at his feet.

"Are you satisfied?" the sailor asked, with a grim smile upon his handsome features.

"No!" cried the youth, fiercely, his breath coming thick and fast.

"Not yet satisfied?" said Rupert, in a tone of wonder.

"No, nor will I be until I stretch you lifeless on the earth!" and the stripling clenched his teeth together firmly.

"One question: why do you hate me so bitterly?" the sailor asked, a puzzled look upon his face.

"Because you are the foe of Captain Estevan. You stand in his path; I would remove you from it!"

"And that is the only reason why you seek my life?" Rupert asked.

"Yes."

"You are either the truest friend that the world ever saw, or else a madman," the sailor said, thoughtfully.

"Will you grant me five minutes' breathing time?" the youth asked. It was evident that he needed it, for every nerve of his frame was in a quiver of excitement.

"Ten, if you like, senor," Rupert replied, politely, and then he walked slowly to where Garcia and Andrews stood.

Baptiste advanced to the side of the youth.

"For Heaven's sake, cease this folly!" he cried, imploringly.

"Never until he or I have fallen! Do not try to move me from my resolution. I am as fixed as yonder giant tree!" cried the youth, impulsively.

"I say, cap'n, he's rather behind the lighter; he didn't even scratch you," Andrews said, with a dry chuckle.

"No; but the boy is an excellent swordsman, though," Rupert replied, thoughtfully. "Were his wrist as strong as mine, one or two of his thrusts would surely have gone home. His attack called into play all that I know of the sword. There is more danger in this fiery youth than I guessed. If my foot should happen to slip, my account with this world would be settled."

"For your own safety, Rupert, I advise you to wound this hot-headed boy. The sight of blood may cool his courage," Garcia said, seriously.

"Yes, do it, cap'n!" cried Andrews. "Damnation! he may tickle you with that toad-sticker of his'n, if you ain't careful. You haven't tried to wound him yet."

"No; I have acted entirely on the defensive. But it is time to change my tactics. I did not wish to hurt him; but now I see that it is necessary for my own safety to let out some of his hot blood," Rupert said, slowly.

"Come on again, senor!" cried the youth, advancing, sword in hand.

Rupert obeyed the mandate, but hardly had he crossed swords with his opponent, when the youth began a series of terrific thrusts. Borne back by the vigor of the attack, for the first time Rupert gave way. With renewed energy the stripling pressed his advantage. The point of the rapier slipping under the guard of the sailor entered his side.

Rupert felt the hot sting of the steel. A cry of rage came from his lips. With a desperate effort he broke through the guard of his foe and lunged straight at his heart. The youth avoided the deadly stroke by nimbly springing backward. Before Rupert could recover from the disadvantage caused by the force of the thrust, which had placed him out of distance, the stripling, quick to improve the opportunity, with another deftly-given stroke pierced the sailor in the shoulder.

Angered by the smart of the two wounds, although both were but scratches, Rupert attacked the youth furiously. The steel clashed as the shining blades twined around each other. The youth, overpowered by the fury of the attack, gave ground. The sailor followed him up closely. Thrust followed thrust in quick succession. Again the steel of the stripling tore through the shoulder of Rupert. But that slight triumph cost the stripling dear, for the next moment the strong arm of the sailor sent the light blade of the youth whirling in the air and the same arm was drawn back to give the death blow.

With glaring eyes and compressed lips, no look of fear on his face, the stripling awaited the thrust that would bring death with it.

A moment Rupert held the blade of the rapier poised in the air, the life of the youth at his mercy. Then a strange look swept over his dark face.

"Boy!" he cried, "for the sake of the mother who perchance waits at home for her son, I spare you. Your life is mine by honor's laws. I disdain it and give it back to you again freely. Go; let this be a lesson to you."

Rupert turned upon his heel.

With a bound, the youth recovered the sword that Rupert had stricken from his hand.

"I despise your mercy!" the stripling cried, fiercely. "This duel is to the death. But one of us will never leave this glade alive. Stand upon your guard, dog of an Ameri-

can! Already you have felt the point of my rapier. Three times has it been stained in your blood; the next time it will pierce your heart to its center."

"Stay!" exclaimed Garcia, advancing with outstretched hands; "this must not be. You live, young sir, solely through the mercy of this senor," and he pointed to Rupert. "As you truly say, three times you wounded him, and yet, when his skill had deprived you of your weapon, and you stood before him helpless, your life his by the laws of the duello, he spared you."

"One or both of us must die," said the youth, hoarsely.

"Let him have his way!" cried Rupert, a frown of anger coming over his face. "By the blood that his sword's point has drawn from me, I swear that he shall have his wish. One of us shall die."

"But, gentlemen!" exclaimed Garcia.

"Words are useless with this rash fool!" said the sailor, anger gleaming in his dark eyes. "Retire, senor, and do not waste your breath in useless entreaty. I am bleeding from these wounds; as yet, he is unhurt. Let him have his way and meet the death he seeks."

Leaning on his sword, the youth had been impatiently waiting for the conversation to end.

Garcia retired, and again the two faced each other. Every muscle in the form of the youth was trembling with excitement, while, on the contrary, the arm of the sailor was as firm as solid rock.

The swords crossed; a few passes and it was apparent to all that the life of the youth was at the mercy of his opponent. The strength of the stripling had been exhausted by the long continued struggle. A sudden turn of the sailor's wrist and again the sword of the youth was sent spinning from his hand.

With a cry of mingled rage and despair, the boy drew an already cocked pistol from his breast, and leveling it full at the head of Rupert, fired. The action was so quick that the sailor could hardly guard against it.

The aim of the youth—wild with passion—was false though, and the ball whistled by Rupert's head, but on its way it shattered the light blade of the rapier in twain.

"Cowardly hound!" cried Rupert, in rage, dashing the shattered blade to the earth. "Assassin! I'll crush you like a worm!"

Then with a panther-like bound, Rupert sprung upon the youth. He seized him in his strong arm and raised his light form from the ground as if to dash him headlong to the earth. But, hardly had Rupert enfolded the youth in his strong arms, when, with a cry of astonishment, he relaxed his grip and recoiled from him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INDIAN SPEAKS.

THE commandante, Don Alvarado, sat on the broad veranda that encompassed his mansion. Leaning his arm carelessly on the railing, around which the leafy vines clung, filling the warm summer air with their sweet incense, he was gazing afar off on the motionless surface of the bay whereon the moonbeams played in rays of silvery light. But though gazing seaward, he saw not the broad expanse of the waters. His eyes were fixed on vacancy. His thoughts went back to years long ago. Again he stood within the great greenwood and saw the wigwams of the savage. Again a dusky face flitted across his vision, a face perfect in its beauty, although the red hue of the Indian was on its cheek and the warriors of the Appalachee nation claimed her as a sister.

"Can it be possible," he murmured, "that this stranger, who calls himself an American, first saw the light beneath these southern skies? He has her eyes of fire; is like her too in feature. The will of Heaven sometimes works in wondrous ways. If he be the child grown to manhood, his presence here is a warning to me, that I may yet be called to account for the crime done in early youth, when the hot blood ran riot in my veins. It does not seem possible, and yet I fear."

The shadow of a dark frown fell upon the face of the Spaniard. He started in alarm, for he had not heard the sound of footsteps approaching him. He looked up and beheld the massive figure of the old Indian chief standing by his side.

"My brother jumps like the deer when he hears the alligator splashing in the bayou," said the chief, a grim smile upon his face.

"When a man looks back over his past life and sees that he has done wrong, it makes a coward of him; his blood turns to water," the Spaniard replied, slowly, a look of sadness upon his face as he spoke.

"My brother knows then that he has played the part of a fox, rather than that of the panther?" the Indian asked, with a searching glance into the face of the commandante.

"Yes."

"Why has it taken the white chief so long to discover that he has crept in the grass like a snake and used the forked tongue?"

"I can not answer the question. Age brings reflection. When passion fires the veins we do not stay to reason."

"When my brother first came to the flower-land he was a young brave—a small chief in his tribe; now, he is a big one—the long rifles follow his lead. Will he crush the stranger with the red skin like the Indian, who seeks the love of the white singing-bird?"

The Spaniard started at the words. He gazed into the face of the aged Indian, as though he would read there the answer to some question revolving in his mind. But the face of the red-man was a blank whereon no writing could be read.

"Chief, answer my question!" the commandante cried in haste. "Is this man the son of Lupah?"

"The mind of the Indian is like the log before the totem is graven on it. He does not remember," replied the savage, evasively.

"Why play at cross-purposes with me?" asked the Spaniard, a sad look upon his face. "If he's the son of the Indian girl, I stand ready to answer with my life for the wrong I have done him, if I am called upon to make the sacrifice."

"Let my brother open his ears and listen," said the Indian, sententiously.

"I wait my brother's speech," the commandante exclaimed, with evident impatience.

"The stranger, whose face is red like the face of the Indian, has gained the love of the white singing-bird. She would leave the lodges by the sea and fly with him to his wigwam afar. The son of my brother, the young Spanish warrior, also loves the white squaw and he hates the stranger chief. Twice, like a snake, his brave has trailed the stranger in the forest. He seeks his life. The Great Spirit above has not willed that the stranger brave should fall and find a grave in the flower-land. He must not die by the hand of my brother's son, or by the snakes that crawl at his bidding. Nor must the red stranger kill the young white brave. The Great Spirit above would veil his face with sorrow, and cry like the wind from the Salt Lake, when it howls through the tree-tops. Let my brother tell his son to crawl no more in the path of the stranger, or the chief of a thousand warriors, whose home is by the great Yellow River, will put his foot upon his head and crush it as he would crush the rattlesnake when he crossed the path of the red-man in the bayou. The red chief has spoken—let my brother heed the warning, or he will weep tears of blood for the death of his young brave."

The Indian turned upon his heel as if to depart.

"One moment—stay, chief!" cried the Spaniard, springing to his feet, in breathless anxiety.

"Well; the red warrior waits," and again the Indian turned his stolid face toward the commandante.

"Will you not answer my question as to who this man is?" the Spaniard asked.

"Look!" and with a majestic gesture, the Indian removed the blanket that covered his breast.

There, deeply stamped, in a strange bluish tint, shone the totem of a "Winged Whale."

A cry of horror burst from the lips of the Spaniard when he looked upon the strange emblem.

He covered his face with his hands as though he would shut out the horrid sight.

When he again looked upon the veranda, the Indian was gone.

"My suspicion was truth then!" the Spaniard cried, in tones of anguish. "This young stranger is the son of the Indian girl. I owe him a life; will he demand the forfeit? Full well I remember the scene in the forest glade and the curses that the aged Indian—the Great Medicine Man of the Appalachees—called down upon my head. To escape the wrath of the red sons of the forest, I fled across the ocean. Why did fate lead me back again to this fatal spot?"

With hasty strides the commandante paced up and down the veranda.

"But stay; am I not too hasty in my guess?" he said, reflectively. "The Indian evaded the question. 'Oh! fool that I am, I have forgotten that a single glance will reveal to me the truth. I will not delay an instant. Before tomorrow's sun shall rise, I will know if my suspicion be correct. If it is, what course shall I pursue?'"

A moment the commandante remained silent in thought. A troubled expression was on his face. The pangs of a guilty conscience were gnawing like hungry serpents at his vitals.

"Oh!" he murmured, in despair; "what anguish in this world like the pangs of remorse?"

Then a firm step resounding upon the veranda told that the solitude of the commandante was about to be interrupted.

It was his son, Captain Estevan, who was approaching.

"I have been seeking you, father," Estevan said.

The commandante noticed that there was an angry frown upon the face of the young man.

"What do you wish, my son?" the father asked.

There was a world of tenderness in the voice of the aged Spaniard as he pronounced the words, "my son." Already in his mind's eye he saw that son stretched lifeless upon the earth, and over him, like the incarnation of slaughter, with bloody blade, bent the dark-hued stranger, Red Rupert.

"Isabel!" cried Estevan, in anger.

The father started. The name of the young girl touched the chord by which painful memories were stirred.

"What of Isabel?" Don Alvarado asked, slowly, and his calm tone gave no indication of the flood of pain that was sweeping with the force of the avalanche through his heart.

"She refuses to listen to my suit; braves, defies me!" Estevan cried, anger in his voice and passion flushing his cheek.

"Did I not warn you against this overhaste?" asked the commandante, calmly.

"Yes, it is true that you preached patience to me; it is easy for you to do so. The hot fires of love and hate are not burning in your veins like they are in mine!" Estevan exclaimed.

"Love for Isabel, I can understand, but hate—hate for whom?"

"The man that has won the love I sought! the love that would have been mine, had not this cursed stranger come between me and the object of my love."

The commandante guessed to whom his son referred, but to make assurance doubly sure, he asked the question.

"To whom do you refer?"

"To this American—you remember, at the ball? The one with the dark eyes, called Rupert Vane," Estevan replied, vainly striving to curb his rage.

"How know you that Isabel loves him?"

"She has met him secretly in the forest. On the night of the ball, too, they left the ball-room and conversed for quite a time together under the shade of a group of palmettoes. Roque Vasca, who was sleeping off the effects of a drunken carousal in some bushes near by, overheard part of their conversation."

"You are sure she loves him?" the commandante said, thoughtfully.

"Yes; she as good as confessed her love for this unknown stranger to me this afternoon."

"But to fall in love with him at the first glance," the father said, as if in wonder.

"Ah, but they have met before."

"When and where?" cried the commandante, quickly.

"Here in Pehsacola, years ago. He saved her life from a panther in the forest. It could not have been recently, else we should have heard of the affair; besides, the stranger has but newly come to our city."

The words of Estevan strengthened the suspicion that had grown up in the mind of the commandante, relative to the red-skinned stranger. But he held his peace, and revealed not to his son the thoughts that were passing in his mind.

"If you will but hold Isabel to her half-given promise to become mine, I will remove this American from my way," continued Estevan, finding his father did not speak.

"Remove him? How?" asked the father, a look of anxiety upon his face.

"With the sword!" replied Estevan, significantly touching the saber that hung by his side.

"No, no!" cried the commandante, in deep emotion; "this man's life must be saved from your sword."

"Saved!" cried Estevan, in astonishment.

"Yes, my son, saved. Better far that you should turn your sword against my breast than it should pierce his heart!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

THE strange words of the father filled Estevan's mind with amazement.

"Why, father," he said, in wonder, "I do not understand."

"And I cannot explain—or at least not now. At some future time, perhaps, I can tell you all," the commandante said, slowly; "but now, my son, promise me that you will not raise your hand against this man."

Estevan gazed at his father's face. He saw that he was thoroughly in earnest.

"Well, since you wish it, I promise you that I will take no further steps to bring about a hostile meeting with this stranger."

"No further steps!" said the commandante, in wonder. "Have you already quarreled with him?"

"I noticed his attentions to Isabel on the night of the ball; a lover's eyes are keen to detect a rival. I sought him out and warned him not to tread longer in the path that he seemed inclined to pursue."

"And his answer?"

"Defied and laughed at me."

"The hot blood is in his veins, too," the commandante murmured, sadly, to himself. Estevan did not catch the muttered words of his sire.

"But Isabel?"

"I will speak to her," the father said, slowly. "Oh, my son, remember your promise—not to seek this darkened stranger with hostile thoughts. No greater calamity can befall me in this world than his death by your hand or your death by his."

"You speak in riddles, father," Estevan exclaimed, in amazement, at a loss to guess the reason of this strange agitation that his father betrayed so plainly.

"The day may come when I can tell you all; tell you of my crime committed long years ago, for which, seemingly, fate reserves a heavy retribution. But, at present, I am groping in the dark; yet I trust that before the morning light shall come, all will be as clear as noonday to me. Do not press me to explain, for I cannot do so at present."

Slowly the commandante walked away, his eyes bent upon the ground. Estevan remained transfixed with wonder.

"In Satan's name! what folly is this?" the Spanish captain cried, impatiently. "Spare the life of this man? Sooner would I spare the venomous snake coiled in my way with head raised to strike. No; if there be virtue in gold and steel, he dies. What can have produced this fantasy that thus fills the mind of my father with such strange conceits? By my sword! it is wonderful! In all my life I never knew him to give way to such thoughts. I'll meet the American, though, despite all the promises in the world. Kill him, too, if I can, though a thousand demons stood beside me and cried, hold!"

The firm-set lips and the look of stern determination upon the face of the Spanish captain gave ample proof that he intended to keep—not the promise that he had given to his father—but the oath in which he had compassed the death of his foe.

Estevan descended from the veranda and walked slowly in the direction of his quarters. His mind was busy in thought.

"I must keep close watch upon Isabel," he muttered. "Now that her lover is so near at hand, she will be apt to yield to the temptation of stealing forth by night, covered from observation by the darkness, to meet him. I'll sound some trusty fellows of my company, and it is likely that the lovers will have an event in their walk that they little dream of. Then, in the obscurity of some dark corner, a sudden dash, a keen sword-thrust, and the career of my rival is ended."

And thus darkly musing, the young Spaniard held on his way.

We will return to the little group that stood in the forest glade.

Baptiste beheld the senseless form of the stripling fall to the earth with a cry of horror.

With the quickness of thought, the Frenchman drew from its sheath the long rapier that dangled at his side.

"Cursed American, take your death from my hand!" and, even with the words, he darted forward and lunged full at the unprotected breast of Rupert. But it was not fated that the American was to fall that night in the forest glade, for, in his haste, Baptiste tripped, and the blade of the rapier passed through the loose white shirt of the American, just grazing his side.

With a cry of rage at the treacherous attack, Rupert grasped the Frenchman in his muscular arms, raised him from the ground and cast him headlong to the earth.

Baptiste struck with a dull thud on his face, and then rolled over on his side, stunned and bleeding.

"The cowardly skunk!" cried Andrews, who had dashed forward to assist his friend. Catching one of the rapiers from the ground, he put the point to the neck of the stripling. "Cap'n, I ought to let daylight right through him!" he exclaimed.

"Hold your hand, Andrews!" cried Rupert, in haste. "Do you not see that it is a woman?"

"A female! Oh, jumping jingo!" exclaimed Andrews, in dismay, dropping the rapier as though the handle had suddenly become red-hot and had burnt his fingers, at the same time retreating a few paces from the prostrate figure.

"A woman!" and Garcia knelt by her side.

The broad-leaved hat had fallen off, and now that its shadow no longer covered the face, it was plain to all that they looked upon the features of a woman.

"Well, of all the mad spells that I ever did hear tell on!" Andrews muttered, in amazement, as he scratched his head, thoughtfully.

"I did not dream that she was a woman until I held her in my arms," Rupert said, slowly; "then, when I felt her perfumed breath upon my face, and felt the soft outlines of her form, that, with a grasp of steel, I held to my breast, the truth flashed suddenly upon me."

"This man probably knew the secret," Garcia remarked, referring to Baptiste, who still lay senseless on the sward, whither the strong arms of Rupert had cast him.

"Yes; and thinking I had killed his mistress, was the reason why he made that furious attack upon me."

"If he hadn't stumbled, cap'n, you would never have given another command on board the saucy brigantine," Andrews said.

"The old saying, a miss and a mile," Rupert replied, a smile upon his dark features. "But, Andrews, look to yonder fellow, while I try to revive the girl."

Rupert knelt by the side of the senseless maid, while Andrews strove to bring Baptiste back to consciousness.

Slowly the girl opened her eyes and gazed around her with a bewildered look. For a moment memory was a blank; then, suddenly, she remembered all.

"You are living!" she murmured, gazing into the dark face of Rupert as he bent over her.

"Yes, lady, I am living!" he replied, slowly.

A burning blush spread rapidly over the girl's face when the words of the sailor told her that her secret was discovered. She raised herself upon her elbow and covered her face with her hand.

Quietly Rupert rose from her side and retired a few paces. He judged rightly when he thought that the disguised maid would prefer to rise unaided.

Slowly the girl rose to her feet and passed her hand over her forehead with a bewildered air. Her system had not yet fully recovered from the effects of the terrible conflict that she had passed through.

At the same moment that the girl rose from the ground, Baptiste opened his eyes and gazed, with a scowl, into the weather-beaten face of the Yankee who bent over him.

Andrews noticed the scowl, and, with a look of mischief sparkling in his shrewd eyes, drew a heavy pistol from his bosom. He cocked the weapon and placed the cold muzzle against the temple of the prostrate man in a way that was extremely uncomfortable to that gentleman. Although Baptiste was as brave as a lion, he could not repress a shudder when he felt the pressure of the cold steel against his flesh and realized that a single motion of the Yankee's finger would scatter his brains in wild confusion.

"We've kinder got a leetle the best of this affair," Andrews said, coolly; "do you surrender?"

"Yes," muttered Baptiste, sullenly.

Andrews removed a pistol that was stuck in the belt of the Frenchman, felt in his breast for concealed weapons, and finding none, permitted him to rise.

The girl uttered a cry of alarm when she looked upon the bruised face of Baptiste. The blood trickled slowly from the slight wounds he had received from his face coming in violent contact with the ground.

"You are hurt, Baptiste!" she said, in a tone of self-reproach. "Hurt, and for me, unworthy creature that I am!"

"Don't speak of it, Nanon," said Baptiste, a glow upon his face; "the bruises are flea-bites. I'd go through fire and water to serve you." Then the Frenchman turned to Rupert, who stood, with folded arms, gazing upon the scene. "Senor, I attempted your life like a coward. I can only plead in excuse that I thought you had killed this girl, whom I love better than I do my own life. In my blind fury, I had but one thought, to avenge her death. My life is yours," and Baptiste bowed his head, humbly.

"I kneel to plead for that life!" cried Nanon—for it was indeed the French girl—and she cast herself at the feet of Rupert.

"Your request was granted, ere it was asked," the sailor replied, raising the maid from her knees.

"And my pardon?"

"Granted also, lady, although I can not guess why you should seek my life, a stranger to you?"

"I can not tell you," she said, in a low voice, and again the burning blush swept over her cheek.

The two turned to depart.

Andrews caught Baptiste by the arm as he passed by him.

"Say! what in thunder made the gal fight for the Spaniard?"

he asked, in a whisper.

"She loves him," Baptiste replied, in low tones, a sigh coming from his lips.

The two passed on, and soon the shadows of the wood hid them from sight.

"And you love her, too," Andrews muttered, reflectively to himself, as he watched the twain depart.

Conversing upon the strange scene that had just transpired, the friends returned to the town. Rupert's wounds had been examined before they left the little glade and found to be only scratches, which a day's rest would cure.

The hour of midnight came. All was quiet within the little city that slumbered by the silvery waters. The great moon sailed with majestic splendor over the vaulted arch of heaven.

Within his chamber, in the house of the merchant, Garcia, Rupert slept.

He knew not that two dark forms stood by his bedside, and that the wick of a little taper shed its dim light over the room, for the sleeper slept soundly.

One of the dark figures drew down the covering that hid the manly breast of Rupert, and there, on the reddish-tinted skin, in a strange hue of blue, shone the mystic sign, a "Winged Whale!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SECRET OF NANON.

By the window of her humble apartment in the little inn sat the French girl, Nanon, gazing dreamily out upon the view before her.

Far off in the distance was the dark line of the forest, that fringed, with leafy green, the blue waters of the bay. On the forest line the eyes of the girl rested.

Nanon was now attired in the garb of her sex. A simple dress of white, which, loosely flowing, only half hid the beautiful outlines of her perfect form.

The face of the girl was deadly pale. Her features told plainly of the terrible scene of the previous night that had transpired within the forest, on which her eyes now rested.

A low sigh came from her lips. A sigh that revealed the anguish that pervaded her being.

"Oh! I am so wretched!" she murmured, sadly. "Why did I not remain in New Orleans? What demon tempted me to seek here the man who does not care for the love which once he tried so hard to win?"

The sad musings of the girl were interrupted by a low tap upon the door.

"Come in," she said. She guessed who was her visitor.

The door opened and Baptiste entered. A sad smile played around the beautiful lips of the girl at his approach. She

extended her hand to him. With a motion full of love, full of tenderness, he carried the soft, white hand to his lips and imprinted a kiss upon it. A moment he looked steadily into the pale face of the girl, an earnest look upon his features. In her face he read the truth. Silently he brought a chair and sat down by her side.

"Nanon, you are not well," he said, slowly.

"You are right, Baptiste; I am not well, for I am sick—sick at heart," she replied, with a sad smile.

"Ah, Nanon, you would not pay heed to my advice last night," he said, mournfully. "I warned you of the consequences, but you were willful and would have your own way. You are but a feeble girl, not strong. It is a wonder that your life did not pay the forfeit for last night's rash adventure. When I met you in your disguise coming from the house where this American resides, I could hardly believe my eyes, yet I recognized your face on the instant. And now, I regret that I yielded to your prayers and allowed you to commit this act of madness."

"Oh, Baptiste, you are so good to me!" the girl murmured, softly, and she clasped the strong hand of the Frenchman within her own little palms, as she spoke.

"Nanon, you know that I would lay down my life to serve you!" Baptiste replied, earnestly.

"From my soul, I believe you. Would to heaven that I could requite your love," the girl said, mournfully.

"Nanon, when will you leave this place and return to Orleans?"

"I do not know—I can not tell," the girl replied, in broken accents.

"Is it the baleful influence of this man—this Spanish captain, Estevan—that draws you here?"

The girl did not reply, but silently covered her face with her hands.

"You do not reply. I understand; my guess is right," Baptiste said, slowly. "Oh, Nanon, this man's love is a fatal one; it will bring naught but despair and death to you. Return to Orleans, avoid his presence. In absence, learn to forget the man who, having won your love, now betrays it."

"Betrays it?" said the girl, slowly, and removing her hands from her face as she spoke, and gazing once more into the face of Baptiste.

"Yes, betrays it!" repeated Baptiste, with emphasis. "Nanon, do not think that I would wrong this man even with a thought, although there is not another soul on the face of the earth that I hate more bitterly. But, even in my anger, he shall have all the justice that he deserves. He has forgotten the vows he swore to you only a few short months ago, and now he seeks the hand of another woman."

"Baptiste, you are wrong," the girl said, quickly. "Estevan explained to me, that, forced by his father, he had consented to a marriage with some wealthy heiress, but he does not love her."

"He has spoken falsely, like the coward that he is?" cried Baptiste, impatiently. "Do you know the nature of the quarrel between him and the American?"

"Yes, he explained it to me. The American was wronged in some way and fancied that Estevan was his wronger."

"Again he has deceived you! The quarrel was about this Spanish girl, Isabel, the one whose hand this false-hearted captain seeks. The American loves her, and she loves him. He is a dangerous rival in the path of this noble Spaniard, and so, soldier-like, he employed an assassin to waylay the American and shoot him in the forest. In some way the American escaped the snare laid for him, and called the Spaniard to an account for his treachery. This is the reason why the American challenged him."

A faint flush of color appeared on the pale cheeks of the girl; the thought of a rival was bitter to her.

"How did you discover this?" she asked, slowly, still unwilling to believe the truth that was so unwelcome.

"From a drunken soldier of the garrison that I met in a wine-house last night. The wine was in and his wits were out. Finding that he belonged to Captain Estevan's company, I guessed that I might learn something from him that might be worth knowing; so I plied him with wine. Little by little I discovered all that I wished to know. Although the fellow was drunk when I first met him, yet he seemed to have the throat of a fish, for he drained six bottles ere he spoke. He was cunning, even in his cups. But by shrewd questioning, I got the truth from him."

"Then Estevan seeks this girl of his own free will?" Nanon said, dreamily, a dread weight of sorrow pressing upon her young heart.

"Yes; he is mad in love with her."

"Oh, this is terrible!" cried the girl, in agony.

"Say but the word, Nanon. I'll seek him out and stab him to the heart, even though he were surrounded by all the soldiers of the garrison, and I knew that my death would come the moment after his!" cried Baptiste, fiercely.

"No, no!" exclaimed the girl, quickly; "do not attempt aught of violence toward him. If he has deceived me let Heaven punish him."

"It would be much more satisfactory to me if I could be the agent of Heaven's vengeance," grumbled Baptiste.

"It must not be. Oh, this is a terrible revelation. I have been dreaming of the day when I should stand before the altar, his wife." Again the poor girl covered her face with her hands, and the hot tears came slowly from the glorious dark eyes.

"His wife," said Baptiste, slowly. "Nanon, do you know

that, even if you had no rival, your marriage with this man is impossible?"

"You think so because I am poor," Nanon replied.

"Nanon, you know the history of your life?"

"Yes; brought up in a convent school in Orleans; my parents unknown; my wants provided for by some unknown benefactor, who, at regular periods, provided money for my use. At the age of sixteen you came and took me from the convent. That was four years ago, and since that time you have been father, brother, all to me, and yet you have often told me that you are no relative of mine, but acting only as an agent of another."

"You have never attempted to penetrate the mystery of your birth?"

"No; for when I questioned you, you replied that the time would some day come when you would be at liberty to reveal to me the secret of my birth. I was satisfied, and questioned you no further."

"Nanon, I am compelled to speak words that will be painful ones for you to hear. Your father is living."

"My father living!" cried the girl, in astonishment.

"Yes."

"Oh, where?"

"That I can not tell you. At present it must remain a secret."

"But one day you will take me to him?"

"Yes—perhaps."

"Perhaps? Is there a doubt?" the girl asked, anxiously.

"It all depends upon his will," Baptiste replied.

"But why is my marriage with Estevan impossible?" Nanon asked, in wonder. "Will my father object?"

"It is Estevan himself who will object when he knows who and what you are," Baptiste said, slowly.

"I do not understand," she murmured, bewildered.

"And at present I cannot explain; but I urge you, Nanon, as you value your own peace of mind, to crush out of your heart the love that exists there for this Spanish officer."

With wondering eyes, Nanon looked upon the grave face of Baptiste. His words were so strange that she could not guess their meaning.

"When I cease to love him I shall die," she murmured, sorrowfully. "When I crush the love from my heart, I banish all the sunlight from my life."

"Even if I convince you that he is unworthy of your love? That at the very moment he is protesting to you that you are dearer than all else in the world to him he is moving both heaven and earth to win another woman?"

"But can you do this?" the girl asked, sadly; it was hard to convince her of her lover's falsehood.

"Yes, and if I do it?"

"I will try to forget him," she murmured, slowly.

"Good! that is all I ask. Ah! Nanon, it will be far better for you in the end."

"I hope so," she replied, a sad accent in her clear voice.

A few more words of aimless import and Baptiste withdrew from the apartment.

A dark look was on his stern face as he descended the stairs.

"By heaven! I believe she would mourn him less dead than married to another. She is an angel in disposition, and yet I have dared to hope to win her for myself. If I can destroy the love that is in her heart for this treacherous Spaniard, my dream may turn to reality. I've half a mind to lay in wait for this same Captain Estevan and try the effect of a pistol-ball upon him. But first, to prove to Nanon that he has been false to her. Then the news of his death will not afflict her as much as otherwise it would. If he meets the American in a fair fight, though, his sword may save me some trouble. He'll make short work with the Spaniard or I miss my guess."

Baptiste descended into the street, and just by the door of the inn he met Roque Vasca. The soldier was half drunk, as usual.

"Hallo, comrade!" cried Roque, in delight: "how do you feel after last night's bout?"

Roque was the soldier from whom Baptiste had procured his information relative to the Spanish captain.

"Excellently," Baptiste replied; "where are you going?"

"To the wine-shop; come with me and have a bottle."

Baptiste, nothing loth, linked arms with Roque, and the two walked on.

"By the way, what are you?" asked Roque, suddenly.

"Nothing!" replied Baptiste, laconically.

"Good; would you like to earn a few gold pieces?"

"That depends upon the way in which they are to be gained," Baptiste said.

"You handle a sword?"

"Yes."

"Do you like to hunt?"

"To hunt?"

"Yes, a panther, you know."

Baptiste guessed the hidden meaning.

"When is the hunt to take place?" he asked.

"To-night, some time."

"Where?"

"In the city, somewhere. It is a terrible panther we're going after. We hunt him with swords, for fire-arms make a noise," and Roque put his tongue in his cheek in a very significant manner.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSASSIN'S WATCH.

THE shades of night once more wrapped the bay and town of Pensacola in a mantle of gloom. The moon once more rose in the heavens and shed its soft light over earth and sea. But, the sweet mistress of the night was hid from view every now and then by dark clouds that swept enviously over the blue vault and veiled the silver light 'neath a dark shroud.

Rupert and Andrews stood before the door of the merchant's mansion, whose hospitality they enjoyed.

Rupert cast an anxious glance up at the clouded sky. Afar off on the broad surface of the bay the night wind was stirring the billows and decking them with caps of white. To the mind of the sailor, earth, sea and air all foretold the coming of a storm.

Andrews noticed the anxious gaze of Rupert. His keen eyes too read the storm-signs truly.

"It's going to be a stormy night, cap'n," Andrews said, reflectively.

"Yes, it looks like it," Rupert replied, with another glance at the billows tossing afar off in the bay. "I am sorry for it, too; yet still, I do not know as it matters much. If my guess is right, it will be midnight ere the storm strikes us."

"There or thereabouts," remarked Andrews, with a searching look, first at the sky and then at the white-capped waves. "But what difference does it make to you, anyway, cap'n?"

"I intend to take a walk to-night, and I should prefer that the storm should not interfere with my intention or spoil the pleasure of my stroll," replied Rupert, a quiet smile upon his face.

A low whistle came from Andrews' thin lips. He understood Rupert's meaning.

"Goin' to meet the gal, eh?"

"Perhaps," and again the smile was on Rupert's lips.

"Well, now, she's a trump, she is!" cried the Yankee, heartily. "No back out to her. She loves you and she intends to stick to you in spite of all the Dons in Pensacola."

"Yes: she is true to me as my saucy brigantine to the helm, or the needle to the pole!" Rupert said, warmly. "I'd stake my life upon her faith. Ah, Andrews, the love of a true woman is a treasure which not all the gold in the world should buy. This girl is my first, my only love. For years her face has been before me, both by day and by night. I have fallen asleep with her name on my lips and the memory of her sweet face in my heart. And now that I know she loves me—that she is willing to forsake home, friends, all, and follow my fortunes throughout the world—my happiness is almost too great for words to express. A few short days and she will be mine forever."

A quiet smile passed over the thin and weather-beaten features of the Yankee as he listened to the glowing speech of his companion.

"Cap'n, there's a cute expression that I've heerd tell on," Andrews said, slowly.

"And that is?"

"Never holler till you're out of the wood!"

"I understand," Rupert said, quietly, a smile of confidence upon his face. "You think that the end is not yet—that I shall have trouble before I succeed in bearing the girl far from this place."

"Exactly."

"Let it come; I am prepared to meet it."

"Look out for treachery," continued Andrews; "this Spanish captain is jest old p'ison. He'd as lief stick a knife into you behind your back as eat his dinner."

"Do not fear; I shall be on my guard; he shall not take me unawares, rest assured of that."

"You are going to meet the gal to-night?" Andrews asked, slowly.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"On the plaza yonder," and Rupert pointed to the broad walk that ran by the edge of the bay and was swept by the fresh ocean breeze.

"You'll probably walk out by the beach there, and when the clouds cover the moon it will be putty dark. Suppose this Spaniard has some of his men in wait for you?"

"That is unlikely," Rupert replied, after thinking for a moment. "In the first place no one—except yourself—knows that Isabel and myself are to meet to-night. I shall keep my eyes about, too. You may rest assured that I shall not be caught napping."

"Shaw! How can you keep your eyes about you when you've got the gal you love on your arm? It's a moral impossibility. It can't be done! I couldn't do it myself, and I reckon I'm a compound of a fox and weasel all rolled up together. Why, when you get under the influence of that gal's beautiful blue eyes, and feel 'em eating a hole right through your gizzard, you won't be able to think of anything but her."

"Perhaps you are right," Rupert said, laughing; "and yet, I shall try to keep my eyes about me."

"You may try, but you won't do it," exclaimed Andrews, stoutly. "Oh, by the way, how do your scratches feel?"

"The pain is so slight as hardly to cause me to remember that I am hurt."

"Have you got any weapons with you?"

"Yes, a pair of loaded pistols concealed in my breast."

"Well, maybe there ain't any danger; but it's jest as well to be prepared for it. How soon are you going?"

"At eight," then Rupert consulted his watch. "It lacks but a few minutes of the hour."

"The gal is to meet you at eight?"

"No, we did not arrange regarding the hour. But, as you see, the darkness has just covered in the earth. Of course, she would not be able to leave the house before the night came, for she might be followed by some spy paid by the Spaniard to track her."

"And if she left the house just arter dark, it would give her about time to reach the plaza now?"

"Yes; and so adieu for the present."

"Keep a sharp eye to wind'ard, cap'n," said Andrews, warningly.

"Trust me," and Rupert's manly figure disappeared in the gloom, for the clouds covering the moon at the moment, all was inky darkness on earth and sea.

"Jest as if he could walk along with that glorious critter of a gal a-hangin' on his arm and think of anything but her. It's a clean impossibility. But if he can't keep a sharp lookout for squalls, I, his first officer, can. I'll jest cruise along in the rear. Who knows but what he may have an engagement with some piratical craft afore the night is over?"

Acting on the resolution so hastily formed, Andrews quietly followed in the footsteps of the young sailor.

We will now turn our attention to the mansion occupied by the Spanish commandante.

At the very moment that Rupert parted with Andrews, when the moon buried itself beneath the ebon cloud and the veil of darkness hid all earthy objects, taking advantage of the gloom, Isabel stole from the house, crossed the veranda and descended into the street.

A moment the girl paused, cast an anxious glance around her, as if fearful of being noticed. No human form met her eyes. She was unwatched. So, with a thankful heart, and with a step as light and noiseless as the deer stealing through the forest, she proceeded on her way.

Hardly had her graceful form disappeared in the gloom, when forth from under the veranda came the figure of a man. A second figure followed the first, and then a third.

"Hist!" said the first figure, speaking cautiously to the second. The voice betrayed that it was the soldier Roque Vasca, who spoke. "Quick; warn the captain that the senorita has gone; warn also the watchers of the rear of the house. I'll follow on the track of the senorita. This senor here," and he pointed to the man who had been the third to come from the hiding-place under the veranda, and who was the Frenchman, known as Baptiste, "will go with me. I'll track the senorita until she halts, and then send him back. Tell the captain to wait in the market-place."

Then with the stealthy step of the fox, Roque followed in the direction that Isabel had gone, Baptiste keeping close at his heels.

Isabel hurried onward. Ever and anon she turned around and strove to discover if she was followed. But she saw nothing to excite her suspicions. The two spies understood their business too well, were too crafty not to be able to elude the vigilance of a simple girl.

On through the town Isabel went; passed through the market-place and took the broad plaza that ran from the market-place to the beach.

"She is going to the walk by the water," Roque murmured to his companion, as they skulked through the open square.

"Yes, it seems so," Baptiste replied, in the same cautious tone.

"Isn't this glorious fun, comrade?" questioned the soldier, with a chuckle. "Do you know that there is no sport in the world like a man-hunt?"

"Yes; but this happens to be a woman-hunt," replied Baptiste, dryly.

"She'll lead us to the man, fast enough."

"And what are we going to do when we find him?" asked the Frenchman, although he had a pretty clear idea of the nature of the events that were to come.

"Give him a rapier-thrust or two, and tumble his body into the bay," replied the soldier, grimly.

"Suppose he resists?"

"Are we not five to one, not counting the captain?" demanded Roque, in contempt. "He could not escape our swords were he the devil himself, instead of a heretic of an American."

All the while that this conversation was progressing they were still stealing along in the footsteps of the girl, keeping well in the shadows of the houses, and adopting every precaution that ingenuity could suggest to prevent the girl from discovering that she was followed.

All at once Roque stopped.

"It is useless for you to go any further. You may as well return at once and lead the captain and the rest here. Do you see the last house yonder?" and Roque pointed northward.

"Yes."

"Tell the captain to halt there and wait my coming. I will follow the girl until she meets her lover, and then return and conduct the captain."

"But are you sure that you know the road that the girl will take? She may have led us on a false scent."

"Oh, no!" Roque cried, quickly; "if she had been going to the forest, she would have turned to the left long ago. She will walk on the beach. Remember, the captain is to wait yonder." Then the soldier again stole onward, while Baptiste retraced his steps.

In his bosom his hand sought a loaded pistol.
 "The Spaniard seeks to assassinate the American in the darkness. It would be a terrible accident if, in the confusion, one of the shots should strike him," Baptiste muttered. There was a world of meaning in the little sentence.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SCUD FOR BLOOD.

THE dark clouds were chasing each other rapidly over the face of the sky. So dense were the clouds, and so quickly did they follow each other, that it was only now and then that the clear rays of the moon lighted up the earth.

Just beyond the edge of the town, by the beach on which the dark waters of the sea were ceaselessly leaping with a sullen roar, stood Rupert and the maid he loved so well—the fair Spanish girl, Isabel.

Tightly she clung to the manly bosom of her lover, and gazed with eyes full of passionate tenderness into the swarthy face of the man who had won her young heart's love.

No dread of danger was in the minds of the lovers. They thought only of the happiness of the moment.

Locked in each other's arms, they renewed the vows that they had so often exchanged.

The clouds scudded across the sky; the sea roared, and tossed its white-capped billows in upon the sandy beach; the wind whistled around them with a mournful cry. They noted neither the sky nor earth, the wind nor sea. Rupert saw only the azure eyes of Isabel, felt only the warm pressure of her lips and the quick throbbings of her heart, beating wildly in response to his own. And Isabel, on her part, thought only of the man whose arms encircled her.

A footstep grating upon the sandy strand, and a dark figure coming rapidly toward them, startled the two from their passion-trance of love. With one hand Rupert pressed the girl to his side, while with the other he drew a pistol from the concealment of his breast. He leveled the weapon full at the dark figure that was approaching with such haste, but a warning cry, given cautiously in Andrews' well-known voice, caused him to drop his hand.

"Do not fear, Isabel," Rupert said, quickly; "it is a friend—Decius Andrews, my first officer."

"Look out, cap'n!" cried Andrews, cautiously, as he came up to Rupert; "there's a squall coming. We'll have to make sail, for we'll need sea-room."

"What is the matter?"

"Some skulking chaps have followed you. I had an idea that there might be trouble, so I jest sneaked arter you, cap'n, and arter you met Miss here"—and the Yankee made an awkward bow to Isabel—"I snugged myself down in a dark hole under a bush by the little house yonder. Putty soon a fellow came along a-tracking Miss, and arter a bit five more joined him. They held a confab right side of where I was hid. They jest put me in a cold sweat for fear they would find me out, and I'd have to kill three or four of them. Well, they decided to jest separate their forces, surround you on all sides, and then make a dash at you."

"This is danger, indeed," Rupert said, calmly, but with a troubled glance into the beautiful face of the girl who clung so confidently to his breast.

"Well, I guess it is! There's six of them altogether, and they mean mischief. I waited till they separated on their surrounding business, and then I got out of the hole and made tracks for you."

"What do you advise, Andrews?" asked Rupert. He had great faith in the ready wit of the shrewd Yankee.

"Run," replied Andrews, laconically.

"Run!" Rupert did not like the idea. Few times in his life had he turned his back on a foe.

"Yes; there are too many of them to fight. Besides, think of the danger of Miss here"—and again the Yankee bowed gallantly to Isabel—"getting hurt in the 'ruction,' as a Paddy-wacker would say."

"You are right!" cried Rupert, fully convinced by the reference to Isabel's danger. "But how can we escape? Did you not say that we were surrounded by these villains?"

"Well, I rather calculate we are by this time," replied Andrews, coolly.

"How escape, then?"

"By our nat'ral element—the water. They can't come any surround on old salt there," and a tone of affection was in the voice of Andrews, and a sparkle of pride in his keen eyes, as he pointed to the heaving billows. A sailor reared, he had all a sailor's pride in the great salt sea.

"Escape by means of the sea!" said Rupert, in astonishment; "but the means?"

"If my eyes don't deceive me, there's a fisherman's boat yonder, oars and all," and Andrews pointed to the beach.

The Yankee was right. Rupert had been too much absorbed in the blue eyes and sweet face of Isabel to notice aught else.

"We shall escape them almost by a miracle!" cried Rupert, leading Isabel to the beach upon which, out of the reach of the tide, the boat lay.

"I guess there'll be some pretty tall swearing when the dons make their rush and find us safe upon the sea," said Andrews, with a dry chuckle.

The two men slid the light boat into the water, which re-

ceived it with a close embrace as if glad to welcome the craft back to its native element.

"You see the darkness covers our movement from the sight of the cowardly curs!" exclaimed Andrews, as he assisted Isabel into the boat. "I s'pose about this time they're creeping in upon us like a lot of snakes. If the moon will only keep under the clouds for fifteen or twenty minutes longer, the 'tarnel skunks will never be able to guess what's become of us."

Rupert entered the boat, and then with a vigorous push, Andrews committed the craft to the tide, leaping nimbly on board as he did so. The light boat danced merrily on the heaving surface of the waters.

"You'll have a nice sail homeward, Miss," said Andrews, to the girl, whose smiling face showed no thought of fear. Then the Yankee placed the little mast in its socket and gave the sail to the wind. The breeze, blowing straight from the shore, filled the canvas, and the boat feeling it, began to move swiftly through the water.

The wavelets curled in little ripples from the bow, and sung a low, merry song as they broke into gurgling bubbles and floated past the little boat.

Then the moon broke through the clouds and flooded earth and sea with its silver light, making all things as clear as by the daylight.

On the shore a group of men were standing in the very spot, where, but a moment before, the lovers had stood!

A cry of rage came from the group when the bright rays of the moon revealed to them the manner in which their prey had escaped them. A shower of curses came across the surface of the water.

Andrews laughed in derision, as the boat obeyed his firm hand grasping the tiller, and sped rapidly seaward before the wind.

The mocking laugh of the Yankee filled the heart of the Spanish captain—for it was Estevan in person who led the assassin band—with rage.

"A thousand curses!" he cried, in anger; "the dog will escape me! I'd give a hundred pieces to see that cursed American sink from the boat into the sea!"

"I'll put a ball through his head, captain!" cried Roque, drawing a heavy pistol from his belt and leveling it across his arm at the figure of Andrews seated in the stern of the boat.

"Do not fire!" cried Estevan, grasping the arm of the soldier. "The distance is too great for an accurate aim; you might miss the American and hit the girl. I would not have her die for all the gold in this New World."

"The devil himself aids these heretics!" cried Roque, philosophically, as he replaced the pistol in his belt.

"I did not think that the American could escape from me this time!" muttered Estevan, in rage.

"Bah! if there hadn't happened to be a boat here, the devil, his patron, would have taken him up in the air!" cried Roque, who had a strong belief in the marvelous.

"Why not follow them?" asked Baptiste, who until now had remained quietly in the background.

"Follow them?" exclaimed Estevan, in astonishment, and he looked with curiosity upon the stranger, whom he had not noticed before.

"A friend of mine, senor captain!" cried Roque, who noticed the look and guessed that his captain was wondering who the stranger was. "A heart of oak—true as steel!" the soldier further added, in commendation.

"Yes, senor, yonder is another boat—a sail in her too. They are driving before the wind which is blowing from the land. If we follow them, they must either return and meet us or else be driven out to sea. Once beyond the bay, yon egg-shell would not live ten minutes in such a sea as is now running."

The Spaniard saw at once how great would be his advantage on the sea.

"But, none of my men are sailors!" Estevan cried, the objection suddenly occurring to him. "No one of us can handle a boat."

"I can, senor!" cried the Frenchman, quickly, the passion for blood rising in his veins. All men have more or less of the savage spirit of the bloodhound, in their natures. As Roque Vasca had said, no game like a human one!

"You are a sailor?"

"Yes, I have followed the sea since childhood," Baptiste replied.

"Let us pursue them then at once!" Estevan cried.

With eager haste they ran to the boat, and dragging it from the beach gave it to the embrace of the sea.

"I told you, a heart of gold!" Roque said, in glee, to the man next him, as they tugged at the boat. He was referring to the stranger whom he claimed as his friend.

The assassin band entered the boat. Strong arms pressed her from the grasp of the sand. The sail was fixed in its place, and like a grayhound freed from its leash, the light craft cut through the waters in chase of its prey.

"Aha! we'll have him yet," the captain cried, as he listened to the ripple of the water under the keel.

"Yes, unless the moon goes under a cloud again."

"What has that to do with it?" cried Roque.

"Why, in the darkness he could tack, beat back to land, and so escape us," Baptiste explained.

"At present they are holding a straight course seaward," said Estevan, his eyes fixed intently upon the boat that contained the fugitives.

"Tis his only course with the wind blowing off the shore. Should they attempt to tack, we could easily run them down," Baptiste said, his hand on the helm, guiding the course of the craft.

The fugitives had watched the launch of the pursuing boat with interest.

"They've got a sailor on board," muttered Andrews, as he looked upon the craft, that, like a bloodhound, followed in their track. "No greeny could handle a craft like that skipper. He hasn't lost an inch of water. We'll have to keep on seaward or else he'll be aboard of us."

"Why not make for the cove?" questioned Rupert. "I do not think that yonder boat is any better sailer than our own. If we can hold them at this distance in our rear, once within the cove, we can bid defiance to them."

"That's sound sense, cap'n. Once in the cove we're safe, and if the Spaniards dare to follow us, the demon of the water, the Winged Whale, will make mince-meat of 'em."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHASE.

ON to the ocean, parting the dark billows with their white caps of foam, swiftly glided the fishing-boats. The breeze, freshening every moment, filled the little sails and urged on the light crafts with racer-like speed. True children of the sea, they danced merrily on the bosom of the heaving waters.

Many an anxious glance the fugitives cast behind them at their pursuers. But the distance between the two boats lessened not. Many an anxious glance Andrews cast upward to the sky. Rupert noticed the glances.

"Why do you look at the sky so anxiously, Andrews?" he asked.

"Watching the clouds and wishing," Andrews replied, with another glance upward.

"Wishing for what?"

"For darkness. If one of those clouds a-scudding across the sky would only hide the light of the moon for twenty or thirty minutes, I could tack, evade those fellows and run back to the city, leaving them to go on a wild-goose chase oceanward."

"There seems to be but little chance of the moon being hid," Rupert said, after a long look at the sky.

"That's so!" cried Andrews, in a tone of disgust.

"Let us hope that the clouds will gather."

"But they are all broken ones, confound 'em!" growled Andrews, in a discontented tone. "There's a big one, though, over there," and the Yankee pointed to a huge black cloud that, like a great vulture, was hovering in the air over the city of Pensacola.

"Yes; if the force of the wind does not split it up into fragments, it will veil the light of the moon most effectually."

"Jest so! that's what I calculate upon," Andrews said quietly. "Once let the darkness hide us and I'll just up helm and slip under their lee."

"But if the darkness does come, may they not suspect that we will endeavor to elude them by such a trick?" Isabel asked.

"It won't make much difference, Miss, whether they suspect it or not. There's too much sea-room here for us to run afoul of them, unless luck is awfully on their side," Andrews replied.

Then the Yankee turned his head to gaze again at the boat of the pursuers.

Isabel was seated at Rupert's side, her head resting on his shoulder and her waist encircled by his arm. On her face was written calm contentment; no thoughts of danger there. The blue eyes that looked into the face of the sailor were full of trust and love.

"Are you not cold, Isabel?" asked Rupert, anxiously, as he looked into the sweet face of the girl.

"No," she replied, with a loving smile upon her face.

"Yet the night air is chill. I can feel it, and I am a sailor used to storm and hardship."

"Am I not by your side?" a bright look of love in her pure blue eyes as she put the question.

"And does that keep you warm?" he asked, laughing.

"Yes." The answer was but a single word—a simple "yes," yet it spoke volumes to the heart of Rupert.

"Oh, Isabel, you are a treasure!" he murmured, earnestly, as he pressed the beautiful girl closer to him.

"I hope that you will find me so in the future," she said, with quite a sober look upon her face.

"I have no doubts, Isabel, except, perhaps, that I am not worthy to win the love of such an angel as you are."

"No angel, Rupert: only a woman, with all a woman's faults, and, I hope, with all a woman's love."

"I do not doubt that!" the sailor replied, quickly. "Are you not flying with me from home and friends? Linking your fortunes with a man of whom you know almost nothing? How know you what I have been since we parted years ago? I may be an outcast from my fellow men. How dare you trust your young heart in my keeping?"

"I look in your eyes and I read there, honesty and truth. You cannot make me doubt you, say what you will. I do not think that the boy who fearlessly risked his life to save the little girl that he loved from the panther's jaws, grown to manhood, would so wrong the woman that he loved, as to

ask her to share his life if he was not worthy of the heartfelt passion that she is so willing to give him."

With every word that fell from her lips, Rupert felt that he loved her more and more.

"I cannot make you doubt me then, or shake your love?" he said.

"Not with your words," she said, smiling. "Rupert, you are the only being on earth that I love. I have no relative living in the world. You must be to me, husband, father, brother, all. In yonder city there is no one that I care for, excepting the commandante, Don Alvarado, my guardian. I have waited long and anxiously for you to come for me, for a secret hope in my heart whispered that you *would* come some day. I knew you the moment I set eyes upon your face, although you have changed greatly. Rupert, my love—my husband; the promise that the lips of the girl gave, the heart of the woman is ready to fulfill."

"Isabel, whatever I have been in the past, in the future I will try to be worthy of your love; no act of mine shall bring a blush to your fair brow," the sailor said, earnestly.

"I do not fear," smilingly replied the girl.

"You prove that by your confidence. You have not even asked whither we are going."

"I am going with you, and that contents me."

"But, Isabel, I can not take you from your home at present. When we join our fates together we must leave Pensacola forever. That at present I can not do. I received a communication this afternoon from New Orleans in regard to a certain piece of business. That business will detain me in Pensacola perhaps a week more, and it may be longer. I have thought of a plan by means of which I think we can outwit the malice of yonder Spaniard. It will seem to him as if we are in league with the powers of darkness below."

"Act as you please," said Isabel, softly. "I will obey without a murmur; without even a question."

The conversation between the lovers had been carried on in low tones, and Andrews, at the helm, had discreetly kept his eyes elsewhere, and had not disturbed the two with his gaze.

"We shall have to make for the cove after all," said Rupert, aloud, with an earnest glance at the dark cloud that was slowly advancing seaward.

"Yes, sir; no chance of giving them the slip at present. Whoever is handling yonder boat knows the sea like a book. I didn't believe that any of the Spaniard's cutthroats knew enough to handle a sea-craft," Andrews said, slowly. He had a supreme contempt for the "dons," as he termed the Spaniards.

We will now turn our attention to the pursuing boat which contained Estevan and his assassin band.

As they sped on, cleaving through the billows, and the good boat walking the waters like a thing of life, Estevan kept his eyes intently fixed upon the white sail of the fugitives, that spread like the wing of some huge sea-bird over the crested billows.

Long and intently he watched, and then, at last, a bitter oath broke from his lips.

"Curses on the luck! we are not gaining an inch!" he cried.

"No, senor; the other boat is as fast a sailer as our own," calmly replied Baptiste, whose hand on the tiller shaped the course of the boat. "Besides, we are carrying a heavier load. There is but three on board of her, six with us."

"He still holds his course seaward," Roque said; "once outside the bay on the ocean, he'll give us the slip."

"No fear of that; he's not fool enough to risk that egg-shell of a craft on the rough billows outside. She'd not live ten minutes in the heavy sea!" Baptiste exclaimed.

Still onward they glided. Santa Rosa Island rose black upon their left. Estevan and Baptiste cast many an anxious glance at the sky. They feared that the heavy cloud that was advancing so rapidly, borne from the land on the bosom of the swift wind, would cover the clear, round moon, and thus aid the escape of their prey.

They had grounds for apprehension, for the cloud was dark and heavy; it was advancing, too, with great speed.

Then, as they looked upon the white sail of the fishing-boat in whose wake they followed so closely, they saw that she still held her course right onward, as if intent upon finding safety upon the broad waters of the mighty ocean.

"If that cursed cloud covers the face of the moon, the game is up!" Estevan cried, angrily.

"You are right, senor captain," Baptiste replied. "In the darkness they can tack, put back to Pensacola, and escape us."

Estevan did not derive much consolation from the words of the pilot.

"Is there no way by which we can increase our speed?" the Spaniard asked.

"I can only think of one."

"And that is?"

"Throw two or three of these gentlemen overboard," Baptiste replied, with grim humor.

"Oh, we should drown!" cried Roque, in horror. "I never could bear water in any shape!"

"Hullo! he seems to be changing his course!" exclaimed Estevan.

Baptiste watched the light craft before him for a moment in silence.

"You are right, senor; he is hugging the shore more closely."

"What can be his motive?"

"Satan only knows! It can not be to give him more sea-room. If he intended to take advantage of the coming dark-

ness and slip by us, his wisest course would have been to run more to the island. I can not guess his idea."

Then, even while their eyes were fixed intently upon the boat, it suddenly disappeared.

A cry of astonishment, not unmixed with horror went up from the Spaniards.

"It's gone to the devil!" muttered Roque, who looked upon all Americans as being hand-in-glove with Satan.

"By Heaven! this is wonderful!" exclaimed Estevan.

As for Baptiste, he said nothing, but shaped the course of the boat more in to the shore.

"What are you going to do?" asked Estevan, who noticed his motion.

"Find out where yon boat has gone to. I'm no believer in miracles."

"You have a suspicion then? What is it?"

"Wait, and your answer will come from the shore yonder," Baptiste replied.

On glided the boat; all on board waiting with anxiety. Ten minutes, and rounding a little point of land—a sort of natural headland that projected into the waters of the bay—they saw the narrow entrance to the bayou. 'Twas the same wherein the fishermen had ventured in their craft, in the opening chapter of our story.

A cry of astonishment went up on the air. The Spaniards now understood the strange disappearance of the fugitives. But, even as they rounded the point and glided into the still waters of the bayou, that were protected by the headland from the disturbing influence of the wind, the dark cloud, that both pursued and pursuers had watched with such eager eyes, passed slowly over the bright face of the silver moon. An inky darkness fell on sea and land. The gloom of the bayou shut the boat of the fugitives from the eyes of the hunters.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEMON OF THE BAYOU.

"SATAN himself aids this accursed American!" cried Estevan, in anger.

"Shall we go on?" asked Baptiste.

"Yes, I'll not give up the chase yet!" cried Estevan, quickly.

"We'll have to get out the oars, then, for the breeze has died away; or rather, this headland keeps it from us. The sail no longer feels its influence."

The words of Baptiste were true; the canvas flapped idly against the mast.

"Out with the sweeps, then. I'll follow them, even into the jaws of the world below!" The tone of the Spanish captain told full well that he would keep his angry determination.

The long blades of the oars dipped into the ink-like water; slowly the boat glided onward.

"Comrade," said Roque, to the soldier next to him, as he tugged at the oar, "I'd give a few pieces of gold to be well out of this. The captain talks about the jaws of the world below; it seems to me that we are in the mouth of Hades already."

The dread influence of the darkness of the bayou was beginning to have its effect upon the superstitious minds of the Spaniards. Warily they looked around them, expecting each instant to see demon faces glaring in the gloom.

Estevan, his eyes fixed upon the darkness before him, was vainly striving to catch a glimpse of the white sail that had so suddenly disappeared from his view.

"If the breeze befriends us not, neither does it serve this cursed American. If we are compelled to trust to our oars to give us motion, he also must have been obliged to use the same means; yet I cannot hear a single sound re-echoing across the water," he said, his puzzled look betraying his astonishment.

"It is strange," replied Baptiste, to whom the same thought had occurred, and who had been listening, expecting each moment to hear the dip of oars, or the grating sound as they struck against the wood of the oar-locks.

But all was still. Silence reigned supreme over the dark waters of the bayou.

"Oh! they've gone down below or up into the air," muttered Roque; "Satan always aids his children, and this American is a born devil."

A dozen boat-lengths forward had the Spaniards advanced, when a cry of astonishment broke from the lips of one of the soldiers in the bow of the fishing-boat. Estevan and Baptiste re-echoed the cry. The two soldiers tugging at the oars stopped in their toil and turned their heads in wonder.

Afar off on the surface of the dark waters of the bayou shone a circle of light.

The eyes of the Spaniards opened wide with horror as they gazed upon the strange sight.

"Holy Virgin save us! what is that?" cried Roque, in terror.

"It is Satan himself! We are lost!" exclaimed one of the soldiers, sinking upon his knees, in prayer.

"Bend to your oars again, men!" cried Estevan, in desperation. "By Heaven! I swear I'll not turn back until I know the meaning of this strange sight!"

A cry of mingled horror and expostulation went up from the soldiers at this determination.

"Oh, senor captain, this is madness!" cried Roque. "It is tempting Heaven to put ourselves in the power of the spirits of darkness that haunt this dreadful place. Rather let us bend to our oars and fly with all possible speed."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the soldiers, in assent to the words of their comrade.

"I fear not the spirits of this place, although they be devils fresh from the flames below!" exclaimed Estevan, fiercely. "Again I say, bend to your oars and we'll soon know why yonder light floats on the surface of the water."

"But it is a spirit light, senor captain," pleaded Roque, acting as spokesman for the rest.

"It may be produced by natural causes. Let us advance and we will discover the truth."

"But, senor captain, it is certain death to brave the power of the spirits of the other world!" exclaimed Roque. "See, yonder mystic light is steadily advancing toward us; it is a warning for us to retire. The spirits are angry because we have entered upon their domain. Listen to reason, Senor Estevan, and let us fly from this accursed spot at once. If we linger here, our lives will pay the forfeit for our rashness."

"Cowards!" cried Estevan, in a rage, "do you value life so highly?"

"By the Virgin, senor, a man has but one life," muttered Roque, sullenly; "if a man had nine lives, like a cat, he could afford to throw one away; but, as it is, he can't!"

"You will not obey my orders, then?" demanded Estevan, in wrath.

"Why should a man go to certain death?" exclaimed Roque, sullenly, and with a defiant air.

"Yes; why?" muttered the soldiers, in a chorus.

Estevan drew a pistol from his belt, cocked it quickly, and leveled it full at the head of Roque.

"Dog!" he cried, in anger, "take up your oar or I'll give you the death that you are so fearful of, at once. Bend to your sweep, or you die upon the instant!"

In the gleaming eye of the Spanish captain the soldier saw written fierce determination. He felt assured that his officer would keep his word.

"Well," he said, sullenly, and after pausing for a moment, "I'll obey orders; our deaths will lie at your door. Let me turn round, though; I don't want to back into certain death."

"As you please," Estevan replied.

The two at the oars changed their places, so that they faced the circle of light. The long sweeps again descended into the water, and once more the light boat glided onward; but slowly, though, for the hearts of the rowers were not in their toil.

Estevan once more turned his attention to the mysterious light that floated upon the surface of the dark waters of the bayou.

Suddenly a cry of surprise burst from the lips of the Spanish captain. The cry was taken up by the lips of each soul within the boat.

In the center of the circle of light that rested upon the water, a dark and terrible form was rising. To the fear-starting eyes of the Spaniards it seemed to rise from the dark depths of the bayou. Slowly, little by little, it appeared.

All within the little craft gazed, spell-bound with terror, upon the awful form. Never before had their eyes looked upon anything that bore a resemblance to the frightful figure that now appeared in the center of the circle of light.

The rowers ceased their work; the oars remained suspended over the water; the boat lost its headway and lay like a log upon the surface of the inky tide.

Larger and larger grew the demon form. It assumed the shape of a huge fish with great, dark wings projecting from its shoulders. Its huge eyes, starting from its head, were red and gleamed like balls of fire.

Terror-stricken, the Spaniards gazed upon the awful figure. Forgotten now were all thoughts of flight. Fear held them within its iron bond, and paralyzed both mind and body. With eyes of awe they looked; they felt that the hour of doom was near.

And, as the helpless men, benumbed by the chill fingers of fear, looked upon the demon form, its huge mouth opened, and forth came a fearful blast of flame and smoke. The sulphurous fumes floated on the air; the flame leaped upward to the sky; and then, as if by magic, on the instant, the demon form, the mystic light, all vanished, and darkness again reigned supreme within the bayou.

Like men awakened from a fearful dream, the soldiers tugged at their oars with arms possessed of giant power. The thin blades quivered as they beat the water with their powerful stroke, and bent like whalebone as they pushed back the waves. Cold drops of perspiration poured from the bronzed foreheads of the rowers. No word was spoken till the light boat, freed from the dark embrace of the bayou, floated on the white-capped waters of the bay, and the sail once more felt the free kiss of the strong wind.

The cloud that had shut in the moon now broke into fragments, and the clear rays of pure Luna once more lit up the bay. With pallid faces the Spaniards looked upon each other. Long breaths they drew for they felt that in truth they had escaped from a terrible danger.

"For the city?" questioned Baptiste, his hand on the little tiller.

"Yes; the American has escaped us; further pursuit is useless. What can mortal man do with him that is leagued with the Powers of Darkness?" said Estevan, his brow clouded with rage as he spoke.

"Ah, senor captain!" cried Roque, "I've often heard it said by the fishermen of the bay, that this bayou, from which we have just escaped, was haunted by evil spirits. They tell wild and fearful tales about it. The American, being a heretic and doomed to evil when he dies, of course Satan's followers have no power upon him; that is the reason why he finds shelter in the bayou from which this water demon drives us. By the Mass! did you see the mouth of the monster? It was as big as a church door. Why, he could have swallowed our boat and we in it at a single gulp."

Estevan was silent, buried in busy thought during the run to the city. The wind being against them, they did not return as quickly as they had come.

The soldiers amused themselves by repeating fearful tales of demons and hobgoblins, and by the time they landed on the beach at Pensacola they had got into such a state of fear that they were ready to fly at the sight of their own shadows.

As he landed upon the strand, Estevan looked at his watch.

"It is just twelve," he said.

"Just the hour for the imps of Satan to appear," muttered Roque, with a fearful glance around him. "Comrade!" he said, addressing Baptiste, "you had better come with me. You may be carried off by some evil spirit if you go home alone."

Baptiste accepted the invitation, and the party proceeded to the garrison. Entering the garrison yard Roque and the soldiers, together with Baptiste, went to their quarters, while Estevan went toward his.

As he passed the mansion of his father, he noticed that a light shone through the curtained window of Isabel's room.

"She left a light burning for her return," he murmured.

"Ah! I'm afraid that she will never return now. She is lost to me forever. My star of fortune is hid by evil clouds."

In the darkness the Spaniard stumbled over a man, stretched out asleep at the foot of the steps that led to the mansion. With a grunt, the sleeper awoke, and, as he slowly rose to his feet, Estevan saw that it was Geno, the black slave that waited upon Isabel.

"He is probably waiting for his mistress," Estevan murmured, to himself. "Geno," he said, aloud, "you need not wait for Senorita Isabel longer; she will not return to-night."

"What's dat, senor?" the black asked, in astonishment.

"I say your mistress will not return to-night."

"Why, she done come back long ago!"

Estevan stared at the negro in astonishment.

"Your mistress returned?"

"Dat's so, sure!"

Estevan was utterly bewildered.

"You are lying, fool!" he cried, fiercely.

"Wish I may die if I don't speak de bressed trufe. Look dar!" The black pointed to the window.

And there on the white curtain appeared the dark shadow of Isabel's perfect form.

"This is witchcraft!" Estevan murmured.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DOUBLE MYSTERY.

ESTEVAN sat in his quarters, gazing listlessly out of the window. The morning sun gilded the tree-tops and the birds sung gaily amid the leafy bowers.

The mind of the Spaniard was full of troubled thoughts. The more he reflected upon the events that had occurred during the previous night, the more he was puzzled. He could not understand how Isabel could have reached the town before him. It seemed as if some invisible spirit aided the American. The demon form, too, that had barred his entrance to the bayou. What magic power had caused it to rise, phantom-like, from the inky waters?

"I can not understand it," he muttered, his brow gloomy with dark thoughts. "Do the spirits of evil aid my foe? Is he leagued with the fiends of darkness? It is incredible, and yet the events of last night seem to prove that my rival possesses more than mortal power."

A sharp knock at the door interrupted Estevan's musing. He bade his visitor enter. The door opened and the Spanish lieutenant, Cadova, appeared.

"Good-morning, senor captain!" cried the lieutenant, gayly. "Are you listening to the birds singing in the bushes? They sing of peace and love, but I must talk of a different subject—war and hate."

Estevan did not guess the meaning of the words of the other, and, with a questioning look, gazed into his face.

"The American, Senor Rupert," explained Cadova.

"Well, what of him?"

"I happened to walk past his house this morning. He was sitting on the veranda, smoking—"

Estevan, starting in amazement, interrupted the speech of the lieutenant.

"Why do you start, captain?" Cadova asked, in astonishment.

"You saw the American, this morning?" queried Estevan.

"Yes, early; just after sunrise. To tell the truth, captain, I was up late last night with a party of gallants, and I drank more wine than was good for me. The consequence was, a terrible headache this morning. In order to drive it off, I rose early and took a stroll down by the beach. I thought

the fresh breeze from the sea would do me good. I saw the American last night about twelve, but my brains were steeped in wine and I was in no mood to talk business; but this morning I improved the opportunity."

"You saw the American last night about twelve?" Estevan demanded, utterly bewildered.

"Yes," replied Cadova, who could not understand why his words should agitate his officer so strangely.

"I can not understand this," Estevan murmured, half-aloud and half to himself; "yet if she returned, why not he, also?"

"What is it that perplexes you, captain?" the lieutenant asked, unable to guess a reason for Estevan's agitation.

"A thought only; but, go on," Estevan replied, evading the question.

"Well, as I said: I saw the American sitting on the veranda; so I thought it would be a capital opportunity to arrange that little affair that you intrusted to my charge. I accosted the American and we settled every thing within ten minutes. I found him very much of a gentleman, as is also his second, Senor Andrews."

"The details of the affair are arranged then?"

"Yes; you are to meet on Monday, at four in the afternoon. By that time the dense heat of the sun will have abated. The place, that little glade by the beach, some three miles north, that is called the Indian Camp. Two or three little affairs have already taken place there. It is the most suitable spot that I know of."

"And the weapons?"

"Swords, as you wished."

"That is perfectly satisfactory."

"Yes, I thought it would be. Captain, if I might recommend, I'd take a few bouts with the rapiers, just to put the muscles of your wrists in play. This American has the sinews of a giant; he had his coat off and his arm bared; a more perfect development of the muscles I never looked upon. I fancy, too, from a certain carriage of the head, that he has smelt powder, and knows something of a soldier's life."

"He is a sailor, I believe," Estevan said; "there seems to be some mystery about him."

"A sailor!" exclaimed the lieutenant, thoughtfully. "I'll lay ten to one, that he is a buccaneer, then; one of Lafitte's gang, the pirates of the gulf, as they are called. He looks like a hardy dare-devil. Take my advice, captain; get in practice, for, upon my word, you'll find that this duel will be no child's play."

"I will follow your counsel. If you are going to the fort, tell the drill-sergeant to come to my quarters after inspection."

"Certainly; any further orders, captain?"

"No; that will do for the present."

The lieutenant withdrew and left Estevan again to his gloomy meditations.

"It would be strange if fate should will that I should fall by the hand of this American. I have but little fear, though. In old Spain I bore the reputation of being the best swordsman in the Spanish army. It would be odd if my skill should desert me now." For a moment Estevan was silent. His thoughts went back to the mysterious occurrences of the previous night. "In vain I seek a clue to unravel the tangled skein!" he murmured.

Then, as he glanced carelessly through the window, he saw the graceful form of Isabel moving amid the shrubbery of the garden.

"There she is now!" he exclaimed, a sudden thought occurring to him. "I'll seek and question her. Perhaps from her lips I may learn something that may dispel this cloud of mystery that hangs over the events of last night. I will try, whether I succeed or fail."

Armed with this resolution, Estevan donned his hat and proceeded at once to the garden. He saw the flutter of Isabel's white dress amid the green foliage. In the midst of blossoms she stood, the fairest flower of all.

Isabel turned as she heard the footsteps of the young soldier approaching her.

"Good-morning, Isabel," the captain said, doffing his hat politely, as he approached.

"Good-morning," she replied, and as she spoke, Estevan could not perceive a trace of embarrassment in her manner.

"You are out early."

"Yes; the perfume of the flowers is sweetest at morn," she replied, carelessly plucking a rose that grew by her side.

"You do not seem at all fatigued this morning," Estevan said, with a glance full of meaning.

Isabel opened her blue eyes widely and gazed with a look of astonishment upon the captain.

"Fatigued!" she exclaimed, an accent of wonder in her voice; "why should I be fatigued?"

"The sail you took last night down the bay," the Spaniard said.

"The sail I took?" exclaimed Isabel, in wonder.

"Yes; which, had it been witnessed by other eyes than mine and my men, who will hold their peace at my bidding, would have sullied the fair reputation of Isabel Morena." A half-frown was upon the brow of the Spaniard as he spoke.

"Sully my reputation," said Isabel, quickly, a burning blush sweeping over her face. "You speak in riddles, senor; I can not understand you."

"Why do you try to deceive me?" demanded Estevan, scornfully. "The effort is useless. Suppose I was to tell the good people of Pensacola that Isabel Morena spent the better part of last evening in a boat on the waters of the bay

in company with two strangers, what do you think they would say?"

"They would not believe you," replied Isabel, quietly.

"But they would believe the evidence of some five of my men who also saw you, and with myself, pursued you until you sought refuge in Bayou Achee, and in the darkness eluded me!" cried Estevan, in heat.

"If report speak true, there are some of the soldiers of the garrison whom the people of Pensacola would not believe under oath. I hope that these witnesses of yours are not gentlemen of a like description," Isabel said, with latent sarcasm in her tones.

"Do you wish me to give the story to the world and prove whether it will be believed or not?" asked Estevan, menace in his voice.

"Act at your own pleasure," replied Isabel, calmly.

"You do not fear then?"

"Fear!" and Isabel drew up her slight form and gazed with flashing eyes upon the Spaniard. "No, I do not fear aught that your malice may prompt you to do."

"Isabel, I would be friends with you; do not look upon me in the light of an enemy," Estevan said, softly. "What is the use of your denying the truth? By some strange chance, you escaped from me last night. The mystery that surrounds your escape I can not solve. But, you know as well as I, that you met this American on the beach last night, then took refuge on board a fishing-boat and put to sea. Do you deny this?"

"And this is *your* story; suppose I bring forward a friend who will declare that I spent the hours from eight to eleven last evening at her house?"

Estevan was utterly bewildered. For a moment he could not reply. Then he recovered from his stupor and found the use of his tongue.

"Do you deny that you were on the beach last night?" he cried.

"Prove it if you can!" Isabel exclaimed, defiantly.

Estevan rapidly thought over the situation in his mind. The night was dark, although the moon had shone brightly. Neither he nor his men had approached within a hundred paces of the two who had met on the beach. Although he felt certain in his own mind that it was Isabel and the American whom he had surprised and forced to put to sea in the fishing-boat, yet he saw how difficult it would be to prove it, particularly if some devoted female friend of Isabel was willing to screen her.

Estevan bit his lips: he felt that he was beaten, and the thought galled him.

"Isabel, I will spare you; but I tell you, frankly, that, so sure as there is a heaven above, so sure will you be mine in the end. Struggle as you will to escape me, all your efforts will be fruitless. Your lover is doomed; no power on this earth can save him. When he is gone, then, perhaps, you will listen to reason."

Estevan turned upon his heel and walked away.

Isabel looked after him, scorn flashing in her full blue eyes.

"He threatens bravely," she murmured; "but let him look to himself. Rupert's arm is strong; I do not fear but that it will guard the life that is so dear to me."

Leaving Isabel to dream bright day-visions of the man she loved so well, and the Spanish captain to muse over his dark plots to remove a hated rival from his path, we will follow the lieutenant, who acted as second to Estevan.

As Cadova entered upon the street, he met the commandante, Don Carlos.

"Good-morning, senior commandante," said the lieutenant, saluting.

The commandante returned the salute. A sudden thought passed across his mind. He knew the dueling reputation of Cadova well, and, seeing him come from his son's quarters, the old man guessed his errand there.

"When does the meeting between my son and this American take place?" he asked.

The lieutenant fell into the trap, and, thinking that the father knew all the particulars, he replied without hesitation, and told all concerning the arrangements for the duel.

The commandante listened attentively, and when the lieutenant had finished, dismissed him with a sad smile.

Cadova little guessed the error he had made.

"Rash and hot-headed, he's all the mother!" the commandante exclaimed. "He flies to his death when he seeks to encounter the sword of the American. This is the justice of Heaven. My act killed the mother of this Rupert, and now, in return, he will kill my son. They must not meet. I can and will prevent it."

CHAPTER XXV.

"TO THE DEATH!"

ON the Monday afternoon that had been fixed on for the American to encounter the Spanish captain in hostile strife, three men left the shadows of Pensacola's walls and plunged into the forest that lay to the north of the city.

The three men were the two Americans, Red Rupert and Decius Andrews, and their Spanish host, Garcia.

Under his arm Garcia carried a long, peculiar-shaped parcel, wrapped in a green cloth. The practiced eye of a soldier would speedily have detected that the mysterious package contained two swords.

Carelessly chatting together as they walked onward, none would have guessed that the three were bent on a mission of strife.

An hour's walk and the friends entered the little glade known to the Spaniard as "Indian Camp," the spot selected for the hostile encounter. The glade was a natural opening in the forest, some fifty feet in width. The tall trees over-shadowed the opening and shut out nearly all the sunlight, though here and there the bright rays stole stealthily through the tree-tops and imprinted their blazon on the ground.

The turf that covered the earth was as soft and fine as velvet; the wild, free vines, the children of the wilderness, crept over the bushes and filled the air with the sweet odor that their blossoms gave.

The two Americans surveyed the spot with admiration. It was the first time their eyes had ever looked upon it. To Garcia the glade was well known. He had acted as an assistant in an affair of honor there before.

"What a beautiful spot!" cried Rupert, in admiration.

"Putty as a picture! What a pity that human blood must stain its loveliness! But that's human nature all over; man is a destructive animal," remarked Andrews, philosophically.

"It is indeed a beautiful spot," Garcia said. "I have seen two desperate encounters here. In one, my own friend was killed outright by a fatal lunge straight through the heart; in the other, both of the principals were mortally wounded. One died on the field; his opponent, just as we carried him within the city."

"Heaven alone knows how this affair will end," Rupert remarked, carelessly. "I shall do my best to protect my own life, perhaps to take the life of my foe, for I am sure that, while he lives, I shall not be safe from his attacks."

"The p'isoned serpent!" growled Andrews, in wrath. "It's a wonder that he agreed to meet you in fair fight. He likes better to stab a man in the dark, or to shoot him down from behind a tree, than to face him openly."

"Rupert's challenge left him no other course but to fight fairly. If he had refused to accept the challenge, all his regiment would have branded him as a coward," Garcia said.

"He tried to get out of it by springing a mine on Rupert, on the beach, the other night. If I hadn't been round with my weather eye open, things would have been squally," Andrews said, emphatically.

"We are first on the ground," Rupert remarked, changing the conversation.

"We are early," Garcia replied, examining his watch as he spoke. "It is but half-past three; the time was fixed at four. We have a good half-hour yet."

"I would that the time were come!" exclaimed Rupert, impatiently; "I am weary of delay."

"Patience! the half-hour will soon pass. Have you ever seen this Estevan handle a sword?" Garcia asked.

"Never," Rupert replied. "A week ago I had never seen the man."

"He is reported to be one of the best swordsmen in the Spanish army."

"The cap'n will cook his goose for him, though!" Andrews exclaimed, confidently.

"That I am not a master of fence is true, but I know something of the sword, and a shrewd trick or two from the cutlass exercise that I think will tax all his skill to guard against. Besides, I shall not attempt to play with this opponent, as I did with the seeming youth that I encountered for him. I shall not give him a chance to practice any of the arts of the fencing school upon me. I shall act upon the offensive. The moment our blades meet, let him look to his life, for I warrant me 'twill need all his strength and skill to guard it."

"I hear footsteps in the forest!" cried Andrews, suddenly.

"It must be our men!" Garcia said.

The footsteps came nearer and nearer; and then, from the concealment of the shrubbery, Captain Estevan, Lieutenant Cadova and another Spaniard, who wore on his shoulders the golden mark of an officer, advanced into the little glade.

The three friends returned the salute of the Spanish officers.

"Ensign Santana," said Cadova, introducing the strange officer, who carried under his arm a parcel like in shape to the one that Garcia bore.

Estevan remained at the edge of the glade while the other two advanced to meet Garcia and Andrews, and arrange the details of the duel. Rupert walked toward the forest and leaned carelessly against a tree-trunk.

"We are a little in advance of time, but I suppose that will be no objection. We may as well proceed with the affair at once. My principal is anxious to return to the city as soon as possible. He has an engagement with a lady this evening," Cadova said, arrogantly.

The three friends understood the object of Estevan's second in an instant. He wished to irritate Rupert, and so, by anger, unsteady his hand.

"You've forgot one thing!" exclaimed Andrews, suddenly.

"Indeed?" said the Spaniard, looking around him in astonishment; "what is it?"

"A litter to carry your Spanish captain home on; he'll never be able to walk," the Yankee said, coolly. "Besides, you ought to have more seconds here; two of you will never be able to hold him and keep him from running away."

The face of Estevan flushed scarlet and an angry oath came from his lips at the taunt. Cadova did not reply to the Yankee's words. He felt that he had got more than he had bargained for; but, as he had brought it upon himself, he could not well complain.

"Enough, senior; let us to business," the lieutenant said, curtly. "I see that you are provided with swords. Will you use you own or ours?"

"We will open the parcels and examine both; then decide," Garcia replied.

The wrappings were removed from the shining blades. There was no perceptible difference in the swords. They decided to use the weapons that Garcia had brought.

"Now, senior, what are the conditions of the fight?" asked Cadova.

"A duel to the death!" cried Estevan, fiercely, answering the question of his second.

"That is perfectly agreeable to me," Rupert said, coldly. There was a strange contrast between his calmness and the fiery passion that burned in the veins of Estevan.

"It is understood then; a duel to the death?" Cadova asked. Garcia bowed assent.

"As soon as your principal is ready, senior"—and Cadova presented the swords to Garcia; he chose one, and then the lieutenant carried the other to Estevan.

In fiery impatience the captain stripped off his coat and vest, rolled up the sleeve of the right arm, and prepared for the fight. As he approached, Cadova noticed that Estevan was fairly trembling with passion.

"Sdeath, captain! you must not give way to rage. Look at the American! he's as cool as one of the icebergs of his native North!" Cadova exclaimed.

"I can not help it!" Estevan cried, angrily. "I can not restrain my rage at the sight of this cursed adventurer. I swear that only one of us will ever leave this spot alive."

"If you don't restrain your temper, this fellow will pink you, sure!" Cadova cried, impatiently. "By the Mass! you'll make the words of this Yankee devil come true, and you'll be carried home on a litter. For the honor of our regiment, restrain yourself. I know that you are more than a match for this heretic, if you are only half yourself."

"I will be calm. I can not understand why I should hate this man so fiercely. It is a mystery, even to myself, but the sight of him stirs up all the bad blood within my veins," Estevan said, thoughtfully.

"That's right! Be cool, and the life of your foe is in your hands."

Rupert followed the example of the Spaniard, and removed his jacket, rolled up the shirt-sleeve of his sword-arm and grasped the handle of the rapier. Springing the point of the blade into the earth, he tested the temper.

"Well?" questioned Garcia.

"A beautiful blade," Rupert answered. "I would it were a trifle heavier, for I intend to try a cutlass-stroke upon him, and I fear that I can not make the blow weighty enough to disable him. Someway—I know not how it is—now that I stand here ready to face my foe, sword in hand, I feel that my anger is dying away. I do not and will not seek his life. I can not explain why my hatred has abated, but so it is. He deserves punishment, however, for the cowardly attacks he has made upon me. I shall strive to disable him, so that, for a few weeks at least, he will not be in a condition to work harm to any one."

Then with his handkerchief Andrews bound the rapier securely to Rupert's hand. Cadova had performed the same kind office for Estevan.

The American and the Spaniard advanced, met in the center of the glade, and crossed swords.

The contrast between the two was great. Tall of figure and brawny of muscle, Rupert towered above the Spaniard, who, slight of form and not over-tall in stature, seemed but a puny opponent to the muscular sailor. But, in a sword contest, the wrist, supple as the willow and firm as the rock, is what decides the victory.

Estevan's calmness had returned to him, but there was an angry spirit glaring out of his dark eyes, and the expression upon his thin lips boded danger.

Warily the foes crossed swords.

A moment the shining blades interlaced and twined around each other; then, with a sudden twist, the American disengaged his blade, jumped back out of distance, and then dashed in upon the Spaniard. Estevan, bewildered by the unlooked-for feint, knew not how to guard against the unexpected attack; no rule of fence that he had ever been taught could avail him here. But perceiving the point of the attack, the Spaniard gave ground and instinctively threw up his blade to guard his head.

Too late for full protection was the movement of the captain; for, whirling through the air, the rapier of Rupert descended upon the head of Estevan, impelled by all the strength of the muscular arm of the sailor.

The light blade with which the Spaniard attempted to guard his head was snapped in twain. The steel of Rupert's sword laid the cheek of the captain open to the bone, and hurled him over backward to the earth.

Quickly the Spanish officers sprung to the assistance of the fallen man, while Rupert leaned calmly on his sword and waited for his foe to rise.

Estevan was uninjured save the ugly cut upon his cheek. His eyes sparkled with rage as he rose to his feet, and tried to stanch the flow of blood from his wound.

In angry tones Cadova protested against the unfair means that Rupert had employed.

"Such a mode of fighting was never heard of!" he declared.

"Senors, I appeal to you!" Rupert said, calmly, turning to Garcia and Andrews.

"I have seen nothing but what is warranted by the code of honor," Garcia replied. "A man has the right to select such mode of attack as may seem most proper to him."

"Give me another sword!" cried Estevan, fiercely. "We have not finished yet."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ARREST.

ESTEVAN'S rage was plainly visible in his face, which was distorted with passion. Reckless of all danger to himself, he thirsted for the life of his foe. The blood was welling slowly from the ugly gash in his cheek, and the flesh around the cut was swollen terribly.

"Give me another sword, I say!" the Spaniard cried. "But one of us must leave this glade alive. It shall be a fight unto the death."

Garcia advanced and presented the rapiers for his inspection. Carefully Estevan tried the blades by springing them into the earth.

"I do not care to have my life a second time placed at the mercy of a foe because of a hidden flaw in the steel which should guard the life!" he cried, as he examined the swords.

"I must protest, though, against the mode of fighting that your principal adopted," Cadova exclaimed, to Garcia.

"I answered your objection before; I do not choose to reply a second time," said Garcia, haughtily.

"By Heaven, senior! your principal is no better than—" but Cadova paused, for Andrews had quietly advanced and stood within arm's length of the lieutenant; and from the peculiar way in which the Yankee had drawn back his right arm, as well as from the threatening light that gleamed in his shrewd eyes, the Spaniard saw that danger was nigh.

"Why don't you go on?" Andrews questioned. "What is our principal?"

"You can not force me to reply, senior, if I do not choose to," replied the Spaniard, loftily.

"Oh, can't I? Well, now, you've taken a very neat way of creeping out of an ugly difficulty; if you had finished what you were a-sayin', and had said any thing ag'in' him"—and Andrews glanced toward Rupert as he spoke—"I would have knocked you heels over head in about two seconds."

"What, senior!" cried the lieutenant, in a rage.

"That's so! Jerusalem cricket!" cried Andrews, in honest indignation; "hadn't you better all fight him at once, you no-souled, white-livered, yaller-faced sons of sea-cooks!"

"You shall answer for this language!" The Spaniard was mad with rage.

"Answer! I can wallop both of you, single-handed!" cried Andrews, doubling up his brawny fists.

"Leave the fellow alone, lieutenant; he is not worthy of the contempt of a gentleman!" cried Estevan, scornfully.

"A gentleman? Show! you don't keep any such critters about the garrison down here!" said Andrews, in supreme contempt.

"He is only trying to save this man from my sword, by creating a brawl. I understand it well enough!" cried Estevan, fiercely.

"If my motive is to keep you two from crossing swords, you ought to thank me, for there'll be a vacancy in the Spanish service in about ten minutes after that happens, and this handsome lieutenant here will stand a good chance for promotion," Andrews said, sarcastically.

The Spaniards did not reply, and once again the rivals crossed blades.

Hardly had the bright blades twined around each other when, forth from the thicket, in breathless haste, came Don Alvarado, the commandante.

A cry of astonishment went up from all when they beheld the father of Estevan.

"Hold, seniors!" the commandante cried, advancing between the combatants, who had dropped the points of their blades to the ground and retreated a few paces from each other at the appearance of the aged Spaniard; "this quarrel must proceed no further."

Rupert and Andrews exchanged glances. It was plain from the look upon their faces that they suspected the unexpected appearance of the commandante was but a part of a pre-arranged plan.

Estevan noticed the look and guessed the thought that was in the minds of the two Americans. It clouded his face with anger, for the appearance of his father caused him no less surprise than the others.

"So, you save yourself from my sword by him!" and Rupert turned away in contempt.

"By heaven!" cried Estevan, "you wrong me, senior."

"Put up your weapons, seniors; you fight no more!" exclaimed the commandante, earnestly.

"Father, I pray you retire and let this affair proceed. This man and I hate each other so bitterly that we feel that the whole world is not wide enough to hold both of us. One must die," Estevan said, firmly.

"Again I say, you fight no more!" cried the aged Spaniard; determination was in his tones.

"But, father, I am wounded; I must and will have satisfaction!" said the Spanish captain, doggedly.

"Hot-headed boy! Did you not promise me that you would not seek this meeting?" exclaimed the father.

"Nor did I," Estevan replied; "I was challenged by the seror there."

"Twice has your son attempted my life; but for your timely coming, with my own hand, I would have put it out of his power to wrong me further," Rupert said, haughtily.

"Be satisfied, senor; this quarrel can proceed no further."

"Father, you tarnish my honor by such an assertion!" exclaimed Estevan, violently; "I can not and will not abandon this quarrel."

"And you, senor?" and the commandante turned, inquiringly, to Rupert.

"I am completely at your son's service," the sailor replied, coldly. "I think that it is better that the affair should be settled here at once, than postponed. Your son will again attempt my life, like the cowardly assassin that he is, and the consequence will be that I shall kill him in the open street, without giving him a chance for his life. Here at least, if he falls he will die like a sailor, and not like a villainous cut-throat."

"Father, again I ask you to retire and leave us to settle our quarrel in our own way!" cried Estevan, stung to the quick by the contemptuous words of the American. "We have had enough of words; let our swords speak."

"You will not listen to reason, then!" exclaimed the commandante, his face pale as the face of the dead.

"His death or mine," replied Estevan, implacable hatred in his face as he looked with lowering eyes upon his foe. Rupert returned the glance with a contemptuous smile.

"Since you will not heed my words, I will use force!" exclaimed the commandante, sternly.

All the actors in this strange scene looked upon the stern face of the aged soldier in astonishment.

"Advance!" cried the commandante.

Then into the glade, from the shelter of the wood on all sides, stepped the Spanish soldiers with leveled muskets. The dueling party in the center of the glade were completely surrounded.

"Treachery!" cried Rupert, between his clenched teeth, as he looked upon the shining barrels leveled upon him.

"What else from these cowardly curs?" exclaimed Andrews, who had thrust his hand inside his jacket and grasped a loaded pistol, which he carried concealed there. But a moment's thought convinced him that resistance was folly in the face of overpowering numbers.

"You are all my prisoners, gentlemen; throw down your arms!" cried the commandante. "Captain Estevan, Lieutenant Cadova and Ensign Santana, you will consider yourselves under arrest. Give up your swords. I have tried to reason with you, gentlemen, and failed. I find that force only can succeed."

Reluctantly the prisoners, for they were such indeed, obeyed.

"I told you I feared treachery," muttered Andrews, in Rupert's ear. "We've run into a rat-trap here."

"Courage; all will yet be well," Rupert replied.

"Father, you have disgraced me forever!" cried Estevan, in anger.

"And you broke the word you gave to me. Had I not been misinformed regarding the time of meeting, I would have sprung this mine upon you ere you could have struck a single blow, senor," and the commandante turned to Rupert as he spoke. "If you will give me your parole not to attempt to escape, I will spare you the pain of being marched through the city between a file of soldiers."

"No, senor, I will not give you that pledge," Rupert replied, firmly.

"You will not?"

"No; you have taken advantage of your official position as Commandante of Pensacola to interfere in a private quarrel. You arrest me simply to save your son from the punishment that he so richly deserves. Guard me well, for, if chance places within my reach the means of escape, be assured I shall not hesitate to avail myself of them," Rupert said, with dignity in his bearing.

For a moment the aged soldier looked upon him without replying.

"Well, be it as you wish, senor," he said, at length. "Sergeant," and he turned to the soldier in command of the squad, "keep close watch upon the prisoner. Senors, you are free," he addressed the remark to Garcia and Andrews, much to their astonishment.

"Commandante, I question your right to detain me!" Rupert said, with cold disdain. "I am a citizen of the Republic of the United States; have committed no crime against the laws of Spain. With what offense am I charged that you dare to restrain me of my liberty?"

"A citizen of the United States?" questioned the Spanish officer, a peculiar smile upon his face.

"Yes," Rupert answered, firmly.

"The Government of Spain offers a reward of a thousand gold pieces for the head of a certain man known as Lafitte, and by many called 'The Terror of the Gulf!'"

"What has that to do with me?" questioned Rupert.

"Nothing, only that you are my prisoner," replied the Spaniard.

"Do you think that I am Lafitte?" asked the sailor.

Gradually the soldiers had gathered near the two, forming

a circle around them. Andrews had profited by the interest excited by the passage of words between the commandante and Rupert to gradually edge out of the circle of soldiers, and little by little to make his way to the wood. This movement he executed without notice, and, once near the cover of the timber, with a step as light as the footfall of the deer, he disappeared within the thicket.

"I do not choose to say what I think," replied the Spaniard. "You forget your position, senor; you are the prisoner, I am the judge. It is my place to question, yours to answer. Senors," and he turned to the two officers who stood together with folded arms and gloomy brows, "give me your promise not to proceed further in this quarrel and I will release you from arrest. You must be aware, senors, that there is an edict by our gracious king against the practice of dueling by the officers in the Spanish service."

The officers gave the required promise.

Looking around, the commandante noticed the disappearance of the stalwart Yankee.

"So, your friend has sought safety in flight? If he is an honest man, what does he fear?"

"The treachery that seems inseparable from your race," replied Rupert, haughtily.

The commandante bit his lips. The shot struck home.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LAFITTE, THE PIRATE.

CLOSELY guarded between the two Spanish soldiers, Rupert was conveyed away from the glade. Estevan followed sullenly, in the rear of the party, in company with Cadova and Santana. The lieutenant told the young man of his unlucky meeting with the commandante, and how he had fallen into the trap that the words of the aged officer had made, and revealed to the father the full particulars regarding the duel.

Hardly had the party left the little glade, while the noise of their footsteps still rung through the dim aisles of the forest, when, from a clump of bushes that grew on the edge of the little opening, rose the tall figure of the old Indian chief, who bore on his breast the strange blazon of a winged whale.

With noiseless step the Indian stole into the center of the glade and listened for a moment to the sounds of the footsteps fast dying away in the distance. Then he turned to the north and beckoned as if inviting some one to come forth from the forest.

The chief stood in the center of the glade motionless.

"Let my white brother come forth; the eye of the red chief is as keen as the eye of the hawk. He sees the white-skin where he hides among the leaves. The red warrior is a friend," the Indian said, gravely.

Then from the bushes that had concealed him, Andrews rose and advanced into the glade, an expression of wonder upon his shrewd face.

"You must have regular gimlet eyes," the Yankee exclaimed.

"The chief's eyes sharp—see much."

"That's so, by hookey!" Andrews said.

"My white brother is a friend to red-white-man?" and the chief pointed after Rupert.

"Well, I guess I am. I'd do almost any thing to get him out of this pesky scrape."

"Red-man friend to young white brave; help him get out, maybe."

"Injun, you're a brick!" cried Andrews, warmly. "I'm with you in any speculation of that kind; stick to you tighter than a sick kitten to a hot fireplace!"

"The-Snake-with-three-tails is a great chief of the Chickasaw nation!" said the Indian, proudly.

"What a name to lug around," murmured Andrews, in wonder.

"Let white-skin come with red-man—follow the long-rifles through the forest, like the wolves follow the deer. Not fight much but think a good deal."

"Go ahead, chief!" cried Andrews.

Cautiously through the thicket the strange allies proceeded. Carefully they tracked the Spaniards and their prisoner until they entered the town.

The appearance of the soldiers with their prisoner in the streets of Pensacola created no little excitement, which was not in the least diminished when it was whispered around that the American stranger who had called himself Rupert Vane was, in reality, the dreaded pirate, Lafitte, the terror of the gulf.

The prisoner was conveyed to the guardhouse attached to the fort, and there placed in a chamber on the ground floor, whose heavily barred window seemed to forbid all thought of escape.

A sentry kept watch without the only door that gave entrance to the room.

No word had passed between Rupert and his captors since they had left the little glade that had witnessed his capture. Silently the sailor had entered his prison door, silently beheld it close upon him, shutting out the bright world and the freedom that he had loved so well.

The sun went down, and the evening came.

As the twilight deepened, a soldier entered the room of the prisoner, bringing in his supper. The soldier grinned know-

ingly as he placed the coarse food before the captive. Rupert saw that the man was the ruffian who had attempted his life in the forest—Roque Vasca.

"How are you, comrade?" cried the soldier, bluntly. "They've clipped your wings at last, haven't they? I little thought when I had the tussle with you in the forest that you were Lafitte."

In spite of the danger of his position, Rupert laughed.

"So you would not have troubled me if you had known that I was the pirate, eh?"

"No, by the Saints! I have too much respect for such a noble profession!" Roque cried.

"On the principal that dog won't eat dog?"

"Exactly! I wish that my wine may be my poison, if I would have lifted a finger against you, if I had only known who you was. But you're all right; they can't keep you here."

"Can't they?" The sailor wondered what was to aid him in his desperate strait.

"No, of course not! You know," said Roque, mysteriously, approaching Rupert as he spoke, and glancing around him nervously, "that he'll come when you call him, and take you out of this, though the walls were fifty times stronger than they are, and all the Spanish army guarded the prison instead of a single battalion!" cried Roque, in a cautious tone.

"Him?" said Rupert in surprise; "whom do you mean?"

"Why, you know well enough!" Roque exclaimed, impatiently. "The same one that saved you in the bayou, the other night, when we chased you down the bay. I knew what would happen the moment we turned into the bayou. I wouldn't have rowed a stroke, but Captain Estevan put a pistol to my head and threatened to blow out my brains if I refused. I knew evil would come of it. That was a most horrible monster that came out of the water after us. I was never so frightened before in all my life. I say, what did you have to pay him?" asked the soldier, mysteriously.

"Him?"

"Yes; the gentleman in black down below—horns and tail, you know."

Rupert guessed the idea in the mind of the soldier.

"Satan you mean, eh?"

"Yes, exactly," and Roque glanced nervously around him as he spoke, as though he expected to see his Satanic majesty spring forward from some dark corner.

"You think, then, that I am in league with the powers of darkness?"

"Yes, of course; I know you are. That's the reason why no Spanish, English or American frigate has ever been able to capture you or your vessel. I've heard the sailors tell all about it. When your vessel is surrounded by the enemy, and no way of escape open to you, you just call on him—and the soldier pointed downward as he spoke—"and just as soon as you do that, a heavy fog comes up that hides everything from sight, and when the fog lifts, your enemies can just see the tops of your spars sinking in the horizon."

"And you believe all this?" asked Rupert, a strange smile upon his face.

"Believe it!" cried Roque; "I know it!"

"You think Satan aids me?"

"I know he does! Why, the moment I found that you were Lafitte, I told my comrades that you couldn't be kept here. I bet a bottle of wine that when we came to look for you in the morning, that you'd be gone, spirited away, and neither lock, bolt or window-bar touched."

"You have great faith in my power."

"Didn't you raise the very fiend himself the other night out of the depths of the bayou? That's sufficient to convince me."

The sound of footsteps approaching the door made the soldier beat a hasty retreat. As he opened the door, he found himself face to face with the commandante, who bore a small lantern in his hand, for the entryway and the room of the prisoner were growing darker and darker each instant, as the twilight deepened into the gloom of night.

"Carrying the prisoner his supper," said Roque, saluting, and discreetly retiring. The commandante closed the door after the soldier, carefully, placed the lantern upon the rude table, and then looked long and earnestly into the face of Rupert.

The sailor waited for the Spaniard to speak.

"How like! how like!" the aged officer murmured, lowly. Even the quick ear of the sailor did not catch the meaning of the muttered exclamation.

"I suppose you wonder at my visit," the commandante said at length, slowly.

"No; I wait to hear its purpose."

"You realize that you are fully in my power?"

"For the present, yes; for the future, no."

"You have hope, then, that you will escape?"

"When I die, hope will die, too; not till then."

"You are aware that your life is forfeit to the laws. Were I to order out a file of soldiers, and have you shot on the instant, no human power could punish me for the act. I am supreme in command, here in Pensacola. You are an outlaw; a price is upon your head. The death of Lafitte would be hailed by the world with joy."

"Why do you visit a helpless prisoner in his dungeon to tell him of his doom?" the sailor asked, scornfully. "Is it because you wish to gloat over your triumph? You say that no earthly power can punish you for my death. You are wrong. On the blue waters rides a stanch brigantine that flies my flag at its peak. On her deck a hundred brave men

—not one of whom but would willingly face a sea of fire to avenge the death of the leader who so often has led them on to victory. Improve the chance that fortune has placed within your grip; call out your file of soldiers, let their bullets pierce my heart, and give my body to its last resting-place; within four and twenty hours after, Pensacola, no more a city, but a heap of smoking ruins, will attest the vengeance of the men who called Red Rupert their captain, and will not rest easy until they have avenged his murder."

There was silence in the prison-cell for a moment after the sailor's bold speech.

"You love my ward, Isabel?" the commandante questioned, at length.

"Yes," Rupert replied, fearlessly.

"Listen to me; I will free you from this place on three conditions," the Spaniard said, slowly.

"And what are the three conditions?" Rupert asked.

"Will you not consent without knowing the conditions? Surely life is worth all else in the world."

"We trifle with time; speak out or leave me!" cried the sailor, impatiently. "I will make no blindfold bargain."

"Be it so. The first condition is that you will not seek the life of my son, Captain Estevan."

"That I can readily agree to," said Rupert, scornfully.

"He attempted my life; in return I placed a mark upon him that he will carry to his dying day. He will never look in the glass without remembering the day when he met Red Rupert, sword in hand, in the forest glade."

"The second condition is that you will give up all thoughts of Isabel Morena."

"Give up Isabel?" cried the sailor, starting, while the hot blood leaped into his face.

"Yes, give her up forever; never think more of her."

"And if I refuse?"

"Death is your fate."

"The third condition?"

"That you leave the city of Pensacola at once and never again set foot within its walls. The world is wide. This city is not the garden spot of all the world. The condition is an easy one," the Spaniard said, gravely.

"And if I refuse to accede to one or all of these conditions?" Rupert asked.

"One fate alone: death!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NANON'S FATHER.

ESTEVAN sat in his quarters. The gloom of night was on the earth and the lighted candle illumined the room.

The brow of the Spaniard was dark; a scowl was upon his face. The gash upon his cheek was carefully sealed with court-plaster. It did not add in the least to the beauty of the young man's face.

An orderly entered the room and informed the captain that a lady wished to speak with him.

"Who is she?" Estevan asked.

"I don't know, senor," the soldier replied; "she is veiled, and her face can not be seen. She speaks like a foreigner, though."

Instantly the thought of Nanon flashed across the mind of the Spaniard.

"Admit her," he said.

The soldier saluted and withdrew.

"What motive can bring her to seek me?" Estevan murmured. "I shall soon know."

The door opened; the orderly conducted the veiled lady into the room, then retired.

Nanon, for the captain's visitor was the French girl, threw up her veil and revealed her pale, sad face. Estevan rose to receive her. A cry of alarm came from the lips of the girl when she saw the terrible wound upon the face of the Spaniard.

"You have been wounded!" she exclaimed, advancing eagerly to him.

"A scratch, nothing more," he replied, carelessly.

"You have been in danger! Oh, why could I not have been at your side to shield you from it, even though the act cost me my life?"

"You talk like a foolish child, Nanon," Estevan said, putting his arm caressingly around the waist of the beautiful girl as he spoke.

For a moment a smile of gladness came over her face and lit up her pale features, as she felt the soft pressure of his touch; but, then, the smile vanished; tears filled her dark eyes, and mournfully she let her head sink upon his breast. A half suppressed sob came from her lips.

"What is the matter, Nanon? why do you moan?" he asked, tenderly pushing back the glossy locks that curled over her forehead.

"Because I am unhappy," she murmured, looking up, with tears in her dark eyes, full into the face of the Spaniard.

"Unhappy!" exclaimed Estevan. "Unhappy when you are with me, my arms around you, and your head pillowed on my breast?"

"Yes; I am sad, because this is the last time that I shall ever feel the touch of your arms the last time that my head

will ever lay on your breast. Estevan, I have come to bid you farewell." Mournful, indeed, were the tones of Nanon's voice, and her deep emotion almost choked her utterance.

"Come to bid me farewell!" the officer exclaimed, in astonishment. Although when the fair French girl had first appeared to him and announced that she had followed him from Orleans, in his heart he grieved at her coming; but, now that she was about to leave, a feeling of regret came over him.

"Yes, a long farewell, for it is—forever!" she replied.

"Forever! Do you mean that you will never see me again, Nanon?" he asked.

"Yes."

"But, why this sudden change in the state of your feelings toward me?" he questioned, in astonishment.

"I have not changed, Estevan," she said, slowly and sadly.

"Even at this moment, when my lips are about to speak the words that signify that we are to part, never to meet again, I love you more deeply than I have ever done, even when all seemed bright before us, and we looked forward to a long future of joy."

"Your words are strange; I can not understand them," Estevan said.

"Fate parts us, not my will," she replied, mournfully.

"Explain."

"You remember the simply story of my life?"

"Yes, partly."

"I was reared in a convent until I was eighteen; six months ago I was taken from the seclusion of the cloister by the man—the agent of my unknown father—who had looked after my welfare since I was a child. I met you—loved you. I told you, frankly, of the mystery that encircled me. You did not heed it, but declared that you loved me, and still would love me, no matter who or what my parents were."

"Yes, what matters it to me?" Estevan cried, quickly.

"It was like your noble heart," Nanon said, gazing, with eyes lustrous with tenderness, upon the Spaniard's face. "I followed you from Orleans here; with me came the man who has been like a father to me since my earliest remembrances. This man has discovered the motive that brought me here. He seeks to crush the love that is in my heart for you. Failing in all other ways, as a last resource, he revealed to me the secret of my birth."

"And that secret?" questioned Estevan, quickly.

"Must separate us forever," replied the girl, tears starting in her dark eyes; and then, unable to restrain her emotion, she buried her face upon her lover's breast.

"I can not understand why that should separate us!" exclaimed the Spaniard, in astonishment.

"When you know who and what I am, you will understand," said Nanon, sadly, raising her head and gazing once again into the face of her lover.

"Tell me, then, the truth!"

"Who the man most feared and detested in all the region washed by the waters of the Gulf? Speak the name that is greeted with curses and maledictions from the lips of all honest men, and you will pronounce the name of my father."

"Surely, you can not mean—"

"The Terror of the Gulf? the man whose hand is red with blood, whose soul is stained with crime? Yes, I mean him!"

"Your father then is—"

"Lafitte, the Pirate," moaned the poor girl, sadly.

"The dreaded sea rover your father?"

"Yes; that is the barrier that rises like a dark wall between you and me. You came of a noble Spanish family. You can not soil the honor of your race by uniting your fate with the daughter of the buccaneer. And if your love was strong enough to bid you overleap the obstacle, my passion is deep enough not to accept the sacrifice. I would give—I know not what—but everything that we poor humans call dear in this world, to rest one little hour in your arms—your wedded wife. But it can not—must not be! Here we part forever and forever!" The expression of agony in the voice of the hapless girl was deep enough.

"Why, Nanon, I have met your father within the last few hours. The wound on my cheek comes from his hand. Even now the pirate Lafitte is a prisoner in the guard-house of the fort."

"My father?" cried Nanon, in amazement.

"If thy father is Lafitte, the Terror of the Gulf, he is our prisoner. But I can not believe that this man is thy father. He can not be ten years older than myself—a young man."

"Yes; Baptiste told me that he was not old."

"Baptiste?"

"Yes, Antoine Baptiste. He is the protector who has watched over me since childhood. It was he who told me the secret of my birth, in order to separate me from you."

"To separate you from me!" said Estevan, in astonishment.

"Why should he wish to do that?"

For a moment Nanon cast down her eyes in agitation; then when she raised them again to the face of Estevan, a burning blush swept over her pale features.

"He loves me," she said, slowly.

"Loves thee! and that is the reason why he told thee that thou wert the daughter of Lafitte? I do not believe it."

"I feel that it is the truth," Nanon said, sadly.

"We can easily discover whether it is or not!" Estevan exclaimed. "To-morrow you shall visit Lafitte in his prison. If he is thy father, he will not deny it. You will speedily learn the truth."

As Estevan spoke, he carelessly paced across the room, passing near the window. Then, on the still night air, rung out the sharp report of a pistol-shot. With a cry, Estevan staggered, and then fell senseless to the floor. Some concealed foe, ambushed amid the foliage of the garden, had shot him through the window.

With a cry of agony, Nanon sprung to the side of the fallen man. Eagerly she sought for traces of the wound. On the temple, just by the roots of the hair, came a faint line of blood, that marked the track of the assassin's bullet. By a hair's breadth only had the Spanish captain escaped from death. The ball had plowed its way through the glossy curls of the Spaniard, just grazing the skin, and that was all.

A cry of joy broke from the lips of the girl when she discovered the nature of the wound. Soon Estevan's senses returned. He opened his eyes and gazed around him with an expression of wonder. At first, memory was a blank, but gradually the remembrance of the last few minutes came back to him.

He rose to his feet, and drew a long breath. The Spaniard had served in some hard-fought campaigns, but had never been so near death before.

"By the Virgin!" he cried, with a shiver, as he thought by what a miracle he had escaped; "the aim of that fellow was a true one. But who can it be that seeks to assassinate me?" Then, to the mind of the captain, came the remembrance of the sudden disappearance of the tall Yankee, the friend of the American, from the forest glade. "I understand now," he said; "this a friend of your reputed father, Lafitte, who has attempted my life in revenge for the capture of his leader."

"You and my father, then, have met as enemies?" Nanon asked, with a shudder of fear.

"Yes; that is, if the man be your father. But, Nanon, I cannot believe that to be the truth. You say that this protector—your father's agent—loves you. May he not have devised this story to separate us?" Estevan asked.

"It is possible; and yet I do not think that he would deceive me," Nanon said, thoughtfully.

"A man in love will do a great many things that else he would not have dreamed of," Estevan replied. "To-morrow you shall learn the truth. Come at two in the afternoon. You shall see this man, and learn whether you be his child or not. I cannot believe that he is your father."

"Till to-morrow, then, adieu," she said.

With a sudden impulse, Estevan caught the girl in his arms, and for a moment held her to his heart. Then Nanon released herself, and glided from the room.

Estevan watched the door close behind her—a peculiar expression upon his face.

"What magic charm is there in this girl's nature that makes me love her when she is with me?" he asked, thoughtfully, communing with himself. "At times I wish that I had never looked upon her face; that is, when she is absent; but, in her presence, the old-time witchery comes over me, and I feel as if I could give up all the world for her sake. What a fool I am!" he cried, suddenly, pacing up and down the room, with a restless step. "Everything bids me separate myself from this girl, and crush out the foolish passion that her face has given life to in my heart. Why did I not let her go, instead of striving to detain her? At present the chance to wed the heiress, Isabel, is good. My rival is in captivity, denounced as the pirate Lafitte. I had an idea, when he first appeared here, that he was one of the buccaneer's gang, but did not think that he was Lafitte in person. His doom is sealed, if my father holds to his purpose. Isabel, too, when she learns that the man she loves is the dreaded 'Terror of the Gulf,' must shrink from him in loathing. Now, what foolish whim prompted me to stay the departure of this girl? Why did I not let her depart in peace? It angers me when I think how weak and infirm I am in nerve where a woman is concerned!" The Spaniard's face was clouded as he uttered the exclamation. "This secret assassin, too, must be looked after. I must not die the dog's death, now that victory is in my grasp. I'll place a guard of soldiers in the garden." Estevan went forth instantly to give the necessary orders.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MORE MYSTERY.

UNFLINCHINGLY the sailor looked into the face of the Spaniard—no trace of fear in his features.

"Death, eh?" he asked, carelessly.

"Yes," replied the commandante, firmly; "let no vain hope of escape cross your mind. You are fully in my power. All Pensacola will rejoice when it learns that the 'Terror of the Gulf' has fallen by the bullets of my soldiers. By some subtle power you have won the foolish love of my ward, Isabel. She does not yet know who and what you are; but when she learns that you are the dreaded pirate Lafitte, the man whose hands are red with blood, she will turn from you in horror, and curse the hour when she first looked upon your face. I know her gentle nature well. She will never love the outlaw upon whose head a price is set."

"You will tell her, then, that I am Lafitte?" the sailor asked.

"She shall know it before she is an hour older!" exclaimed the commandante.

"She will not believe you," the sailor said, smiling. "She

has too much faith in me. She knows me as Rupert Vane. Years ago, when first we met, I had another appellation. When you tell her that I am the pirate, and ask her to cast away the love for me that is in her heart, she will believe that you speak falsely, and that it is for your son's sake you utter the falsehood."

The Spaniard remained silent for a moment. In his heart he knew that the American spoke the truth.

"Why not accept my offer? Take life and freedom, and leave this girl," the commandante exclaimed, impatiently.

"There are other maidens in the world as fair as she."

"My eyes have never looked upon them," the sailor replied.

"On one hand, life, freedom; on the other, death! You are a madman to hesitate, even for a moment!" The anxiety of the Spaniard was plainly visible.

"I have pledged my faith unto Isabel; I will meet death unflinchingly rather than break that pledge," the sailor said, firmly.

"You are mad indeed!" the commandante exclaimed.

"No—only honest. Besides, I am not dead yet, nor do I see the soldiers drawn out, with their shining muskets leveled at my heart. There's many a slip between the cup and the lip. One hour makes me your prisoner—the next may see me free again. The wheel of fortune turns ever; she is a fickle goddess. If she frowns on me now, soon may she smile."

"You do not despair, then?" asked the Spaniard, in wonder.

"No; nor will I until I see the flash of the powder that drives the balls that bring me death," replied the sailor, carelessly.

A moment the Spaniard looked into the fearless face of his prisoner: then dropped his eyes to earth and seemed lost in thought.

By the dim light which the lantern gave, the sailor surveyed the massive features of the old soldier—a peculiar expression upon his face. And as he looked, thoughtfully he pushed back the curls that clustered over his bronzed forehead, as though by the act he would quicken the motion of his brain.

"Strange how familiar the face of this man is to me," he murmured, lowly, to himself. "Can he know aught of the mystery that clouds all my early life? If I have never seen him in the past, why should his face recall remembrances of that past? It is a riddle; shall I ever solve it?"

Suddenly the commandante raised his eyes once again to the face of the young man.

"I will give you until to-morrow morning to reflect upon the offer I have made you. If you do not accept, at six in the morning you will die."

"Why, what a respite you give me!" said the sailor, smiling. "You will be spared the pain of again hearing me refuse your offer."

"Ah! in the morning you will accept!" cried the old man, eagerly.

"No; on the contrary, in the morning I shall be free," replied Rupert, calmly.

The commandante looked at the sailor with wonder in his face. The coolness of the rover stupefied him.

"You will escape? Impossible!"

"Do not be too sure of that. I have a presentiment that I shall not see the morning light peep in through yonder barred window."

The Spaniard seized the lantern, and advancing to the window, examined the thick iron bars that guarded it; tried each one with his hand. All were secure in their places.

"You cannot escape from here unless by a miracle," the commandante exclaimed, turning to Rupert.

"Fortune may work that miracle to save me. But one thing I can not understand: why are you so eager to have me accept your offer and depart? What difference does it make to you whether I am in the land of the living or under the green sod? The men of your nation are not wont to be merciful to their foes."

"I do not seek your life," the soldier said, gravely. "I would rather aid your escape than see you fall by the bullets of my men. I have offered you fairly. Blame your own folly if you perish like a dog."

"You have some reason for not wishing me to die," the sailor said, suddenly.

The Spaniard started at the words; a troubled look swept over his face, and he avoided the earnest gaze of the American.

"Senor commandante, two objects brought me to Pensacola: first, to win the girl I loved, your ward, Isabel Morena, and thus redeem the pledge I gave to her years ago; second, to unravel the tangled skein of mystery that conceals the secret of my birth. I think that you know something of that secret. Is it not so? Is not that the reason why you would rather aid me escape than see me die?"

The commandante bit his lip convulsively. His powerful frame for a moment shook with agitation; but answer made he none. He took the lantern from the table, and proceeded to the door.

"You will not answer my question?" Rupert said.

"I can not; how can I speak of what I do not know?" asked the Spaniard, turning and facing his prisoner. And, as he spoke, even to himself the tones of his voice sounded hollow and unnatural.

"You are deceiving me!" the sailor cried, in contempt.

"How would you like to receive a visit from my ward, Isabel, before you die?" asked the commandante, suddenly, as though striving to change the subject of the conversation.

"Her presence would be as welcome to me as the sight of

land to the ocean-tossed mariner!" cried Rupert, eagerly. "But no; you are jesting with me. You will not let her visit me in my dungeon."

"I do not jest," said the commandante, gravely. "If she wishes to come, she can; I will interpose no objection; nay, more, I myself will tell her that you are here, and that she can visit you if she so desires."

"I thank you for the favor, even though you send me to death the moment the interview is over!" exclaimed the sailor, warmly.

"Is there any thing else that you desire?" asked the Spaniard, lingering at the door as though he were unwilling to depart.

"Nothing."

"Within an hour Isabel will come."

The door closed behind the stately figure of the Spanish officer. Rupert heard the harsh grating sound made by the heavy bolts as they shot into their sockets. He was alone in the gloom. Alone, to dream of the bliss of once more holding within his arms the woman that he loved so well.

The commandante, after giving orders to the sergeant to keep a diligent watch upon the prisoner, descended to the barrack-yard. Crossing it, he passed through the gate that gave entrance to the garden which surrounded his own mansion.

At the gate he met his son.

"Where is Isabel, Estevan?" the father asked.

"I do not know," the captain replied, gloomily. "She seems to take particular care to keep out of my way. From the manner in which she acts, one would think that my sight was poison to her."

"I have just come from an interview with the prisoner," the commandante added.

"Curse him!" cried Estevan, bitterly. "Why did you interfere just as you did, father? The fellow has marked me for life; but for you, my sword would have given me ample revenge."

"Estevan, my son, it was to save your life that I came. You are no match for this man."

"No match for him!" exclaimed the son, quickly. "Father, the Spanish army holds not ten better swordsmen than myself."

"And yet that mark upon your cheek seems to declare that this sea-rover is your master," replied the commandante, significantly.

"It was by a trick that he broke down my guard and wounded me."

"And had I not come, and the fight continued, by another trick he would have passed his blade through your body," the father said, gravely.

"No, father, I was prepared for him; he could not have succeeded in a second attempt. Is there a magic power protects this man's life, that you are so certain he would kill me?" Estevan asked, scornfully.

"Yes; he is protected from your sword," the commandante replied, slowly and sorrowfully.

Estevan stared at his father in amazement. He could hardly believe his hearing.

"What protects him?" he asked.

"The weight of guilt that hangs about my soul," answered the aged soldier, in a solemn tone.

"The weight of guilt?" exclaimed the captain, in wonder.

"Yes; years ago I wronged this man. It was my act that killed his mother. Would it not be a just vengeance if he should kill my son? It was to save you that I interposed."

"The death of the mother of this man lies at your door?" Estevan asked, astonished at the strange revelation.

"Yes."

"Does he know it?"

"No; he does not even know who or what his parents were. His birth is a mystery to him. But, now, some dark angel must have whispered in his ear that I know something of the dreaded secret, for he questioned me. Taken by surprise, at first I could hardly find words to evade the question."

"But the father of this man?"

"Do not speak of him!" cried the commandante, quickly; "the thought is worm-wood to me. Oh! sleeping or waking, a single face alone is ever before my eyes; the face is ghastly with the hues of death, although the red life-current of the Indian flows through every vein! The memory of that face haunts me, and turns all the sweetness of this life into bitter drops of gall." Intense were the tones of agony, and the stalwart figure of the old soldier trembled with emotion.

Estevan looked on in wonder. Never before had he beheld his stern and haughty father so agitated.

"This man's father is dead, then?"

"No questions," replied the commandante; "speak no more on this subject. I cannot bear it. As I told you, I have just come from the prisoner. On three conditions I have offered to release him. If he accepts, he is a free man."

"What, you will let this dangerous rover go free, now that you have him securely in your power, his life at your mercy?" Estevan cried, in extreme astonishment.

"Yes; if he will give up Isabel, forswear his quarrel with you, agree to leave Pensacola forever and never return to it, I will give him his freedom."

"And if he refuses, you will kill him?"

"No, no, I cannot kill him; his blood must not stain my hands!" exclaimed the commandante, in great excitement.

CHAPTER XXX.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

ESTEVAN could not understand why his father should be so strangely excited.

"You will not kill him?"

"No," replied the commandante, "I cannot stain my soul with such a crime as that. Besides, I have done this man wrong enough already; I will not add to the account."

"But, if he refuses to accede to the conditions, how then will you act?"

"Keep him in close confinement until I can send both you and Isabel away," replied the father, slowly. "I have a scheme by means of which I think I can induce Isabel to give up this man and receive you for her husband."

"Give him up!" exclaimed Estevan, quickly. "That she will never do. I know something of her character; death alone can make her prove false to the pledge which she has given. She loves this daring sea-rover, and she will be faithful to that love until the shadow of the tomb falls upon her."

"Do not be so sure of that. By fair means I know that Isabel will never consent to break her word; but, by cunning, she may be tricked into acting as I wish. If I can induce her to give this sailor up, and with her own lips tell him so, then he will readily agree to the conditions which will give him freedom."

"I hope you will succeed, father; but I have very little faith that you will. A girl of Isabel's passionate nature loves once, loves always," Estevan said, an expression of doubt upon his features.

"It is through her love for this man that I shall win her consent to give him up," the commandante rejoined.

"I can not guess the riddle."

"Within an hour it will be solved. I shall go to Isabel at once. I have promised the sailor that Isabel shall be allowed to see him to-night."

Estevan gazed at his father in amazement.

"What? Father, are you mad?" he cried. "Do you not see, that, if you let them see each other, it will but strengthen them in their resolution?"

"No," the father replied, shaking his head, gravely. "It will be a final meeting. Once they part it will be forever."

"Well, the affair is in your hands," Estevan said, his face expressing the doubt he did not speak; "do as you please. If you succeed, it will be miraculous."

"Ah, Estevan! you little guess the crime that I am committing, but it is for your sake. You are dearer to me than all the world besides," the commandante said, sadly. Then he left the young man and proceeded on toward his mansion.

Estevan looked after his father in astonishment. He could not understand the strange words of his sire.

"There is some deep mystery in all this," he said, thoughtfully. "I can not guess it, nor will I weary my brains in trying; time will bring forth the truth. It is strange, though, that my father should be so anxious to preserve the life of this daring outlaw, who has ventured so boldly into our city, despite the fact that a heavy price has been set upon his head, and that, if recognized, he is liable to be shot down without warning. One can not question his courage, though, in this case, it is more like madness."

The soldier proceeded onward to his quarters.

Then, from amid the foliage of the garden, rose two dark forms. Carefully they listened to the sounds of the retreating footsteps. The two who thus lay in ambush were Andrews, the Yankee sailor, and the Appalachee chief who had forsaken his nation and become a Chickasaw.

"The pesky serpents!" exclaimed Andrews, cautiously; "did you hear what they said, Injun?"

"The-Snake-with-three-tails got long ears—hear much," replied the chief.

"What is to be done? The 'tarnal villains have got my cap'n locked up in the guard-house over yonder, and maybe they may change their minds and have him shot at any minute. But if they do, I swear to gracious, I'll run the brigantine up the harbor and knock Pensacola into such a heap of ruins that there won't be one stone left on another in proper fix." Deep was the voice of the Yankee and stern was his brow as he uttered the threat.

"The white-red-skin shall not die—the forest chief will save him from the long-knives," said the Indian, tersely.

"You will? How?" exclaimed Andrews, a glow of joy lighting up his rugged features.

"Wait—you see," replied the chief.

"What's to be done now?" asked Andrews, who knew that it was of little use to question the Indian further.

"You wait here. The chief will follow the great warrior of the pale-faces. The ears of the red-men are open—he would hear more," replied the savage.

"Good; I'll wait."

"Chief come back soon, maybe," and, without further word, the red-man followed in the footsteps of the commandante, treading on the earth so lightly that no sound of his footfall broke the stillness of the night. Andrews watched him until he was out of sight.

"He's a hull team—a spanker, and no mistake!" Andrews exclaimed. Then a sound fell on his ear, and quickly he sought concealment under the leaves. Hardly had he crouched down, concealed from view by the bushes, when the figure of a man stole cautiously through the garden.

He moved with stealthy tread, and evidently feared discov-

ery. In his path, he passed close to the hiding-place of Andrews. The Yankee recognized the stranger at once. It was the Frenchman, Baptiste, who had acted as the second of the girl who, disguised in man's attire, had taken Estevan's place and encountered Rupert.

Leaving Andrews snugly hid amid the bushes, we will follow the movements of Baptiste. Treading as light as a cat, he proceeded onward. He halted at last, within some thirty feet of the house in which Captain Estevan had his quarters. The light burning within the captain's room showed plainly through the open window.

Baptiste drew a large pistol from his belt, and, sinking behind a bush, leveled it full at the open window.

"Now, then," he muttered, "let this Spaniard approach that window, and I'll send him to the shades below ere he can utter a prayer for salvation. The Spaniard dead, Nanon will forget him, and learn to love me, the man who would freely pour out his life's blood, drop by drop, to serve her."

With the result of Baptiste's plan we are already acquainted, as the narrow escape of the Spanish captain from the bullet of the ambushed foe has been detailed in the preceding chapter.

In the darkness of his prison-house the sailor sat. An hour or two had elapsed since the commandante had departed. No other visitor had approached the prisoner.

Deeply musing, the quick ear of Rupert caught the sound of footsteps approaching the portal that gave entrance to his cell. The door opened, and Roque Vasca—bearing a lantern, lighted, in his hand, which, after entering, he placed upon the table—conducted Isabel into the room. Then the soldier left the apartment, and closed the door behind him.

The lovers were alone together.

With a cry of joy, Isabel sprung into the arms of the sailor. Tenderly Rupert held the slight form of the beautiful girl to his heart, and kissed the pure, white forehead gently.

"Isabel, my heart's love," he said, softly.

"Oh, Rupert, you are in such danger!" she murmured.

"Danger surrounds us ever in this life, Isabel. It walks by our side on the earth, floats with us on the heaving billows of the sea. I have looked so often on danger that it has become an old, a familiar friend; its presence has no terror for me."

"But now, there is no hope of escape for you," the girl said, sadly, the hot tears filling the beautiful blue eyes.

"No hope! Isabel, you are wrong," Rupert said, quickly.

"Hope never forsakes us in this world until the last breath is drawn, and we enter the portal that lets us into the other life. I have been placed in as desperate a strait as this before. Why, I have tossed a week in an open boat on the broad Atlantic; been driven nearly mad by thirst—like the ancient mariner, water all around, and not a drop to drink. Yet, safety has come at last. 'Never despair' is the motto that I have blazoned on the flag that I have nailed to my mast-head of life, and while I live, I never will."

"Rupert, do you not know that you are to die to-morrow morning?" Isabel asked, with a pale face.

"I have been told so," the prisoner said, quietly.

"You speak as calmly as if death was not knocking at the door!" Isabel cried, clinging in agony to her lover's breast.

"It is not morning yet, Isabel. In the night, chances of escape may come," Rupert replied, softly smoothing back the silken, golden hair from the girl's white forehead.

"You have hope of escape?" Isabel asked, eagerly.

"As I told you before, Isabel, I shall hope until I die."

Again the face of the girl clouded over. His confident words had given her hope.

"But, at present, you do not know of any way to escape from the power of these cruel men?"

"No."

"Oh, Rupert, you shall not die!" she cried, in agony.

"Let us hope that Heaven will save me. My trust now is there, and there alone," he said, simply.

"Rupert, it is for me you die. Had not my fatal love lured you back to Pensacola, you would never have been placed in this dire extremity." And Isabel, hiding her face on the breast of the sailor, sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Do not cry, Isabel," the sailor said, gently, and he raised the shapely head and kissed away the tears tenderly from the long, golden eyelashes. "Again, I say, let us hope."

"Rupert, I can never be your wife, even if you escape from this place unhurt," said Isabel, suddenly, and as she spoke her voice trembled with emotion.

"Isabel!" exclaimed the sailor, in amazement, hardly able to believe the evidence of his hearing.

"I repeat—I can not be your wife, even if you escape from this dreadful doom," she exclaimed, with feverish agitation; but, even while she spoke, she clung closer and closer to her lover's breast.

"Isabel, what strange frenzy prompts you to utter such terrible words—words that tear my heart, and give me more pain than can the bullets of this treacherous Spaniard?" Rupert exclaimed, an expression of deep sadness clouding his face, and a world of heartfelt agony in his voice. "I could have gone to my death unshrinkingly, knowing that you loved me to the last; but now—I—oh, Isabel! your words will make a coward of me, and I shall fear to meet the death that I have so often faced without a shudder! Why have you spoken so cruelly?"

"Suppose I say I do not love you any longer?" asked Isabel, in a faltering voice, and without looking in the face of the man to whose breast she still clung closely.

"You have ceased to love me?" he cried, in extreme sur-

prise. "Isabel, when I believe that, even though you yourself speak the words, then I shall believe that the stars above never more will shine—that the sea is always calm, and no wind will again vex the billows. You say that you do not love me, yet you cling to my breast. I can feel the warm blood throbbing in your veins—you hide your face from my gaze—you can not look me in the eye and utter again the only falsehood that I ever heard your lips speak."

With a convulsive sob Isabel answered Rupert's words.

Then a slight noise fell upon the ear of the sailor. He turned his head in surprise. A shadowy form stood within the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

FORTH from the darkness, into the bright circle of light that the lantern dimly cast, stepped the tall form of the Indian chief—The-snake-with-three-tails.

Rupert and Isabel looked upon him with surprise. How he had gained entrance to the prison-cell passed their comprehension. He had evidently not entered by the door, for he advanced from the opposite side of the room.

The sailor recognized the chief at once, and knew him for a friend. Isabel, still clinging fondly to her lover's breast, looked upon the Indian with surprise.

"The red chief is glad to see his brother," said the savage, placing his hand upon his heart.

"How gained you entrance here, chief?" asked Rupert, in surprise.

"Wah! Indian has long memory—never forgets. Hole in big wigwam there," and the savage pointed to the dark corner from whence he had come. "Many moons ago the red chief knew the wigwams of Pensacola as he knows the paths in the forest of his nation. He remembered the hole in the floor of the big wigwam. His white brother is in the snare of the long-knives—red-man take him out—it is good."

"You come to save me then?" Rupert asked, eagerly.

"The red chief has said," replied the savage, with grave dignity.

"You see the chance of escape has come!" Rupert said, softly, to Isabel.

"Yes," she murmured, in reply, with downcast eyes.

"And you have spoken words that say we must separate forever," the sailor added, sadly. "Oh, Isabel, I would not have believed you false, even though all the world had sworn it. I have faith in the pure love of a true woman; faith that I thought nothing in this world could shake; but your words have proved to me that my confidence was rash, my judgment wrong."

"Rupert, I—" but Isabel faltered in her speech; again the tear-drops filled her eyes and she hid her face on the breast of the sailor, her bosom heaving tumultuously with suppressed emotion.

"Isabel, recall your cruel words; tell me once again that you love me, and by the assurance make me blessed forever!" pleaded Rupert, lowly, but passionately.

"I—I can not!" she murmured, a sob choking her voice.

"You are false to your word, then?"

After a minute's pause, as though the girl was striving to find strength to speak, the answer came.

"Yes."

"Isabel, with that little word you have banished all the happiness of my life forever," Rupert said, sadly.

"Hear the red-man speak," said the Indian, suddenly. His keen hearing had heard every word of the conversation between the two, although it had been conducted in whispers.

In astonishment, Rupert and Isabel looked upon the chief.

"When the white flower says that she does not love the great salt lake chief, the Great Spirit above covers his face in sorrow, for she speaks with a forked tongue. Let my brother open his ears. He shall hear words that will light up his heart as the sun lights up the forest glade when it breaks through the angry clouds and bids them fly."

"Speak!" cried Rupert, eagerly. The words of the savage told of hope and joy.

"Like a snake, the red chief crawled in the grass and followed on the trail of the big sachem of the long-knives," said the savage, slowly.

"You mean the commandante, Don Alvarado?"

"Yes," replied the Indian, to Rupert's question; "the red-man followed the big chief till he entered his wigwam. He waited outside and watched in the grass. He saw the white chief appear at one of the windows of the lodge wherein a light burned. The red chief crawled like a snake up a tree that grew by the window. In the big wigwam was the white chief and the white flower." The Indian pointed to Isabel as he spoke. "The ears of the red-man were opened—he heard all."

"Ah," and Isabel again hid her face on Rupert's breast. She guessed what the chief was about to say.

"The big chief of the long-knives told the white flower that he held the salt lake chief as the snake holds the bird. His life was at the mercy of the big chief—he had but to raise his hand and the captive would go to the happy hunting-grounds. The white flower begged for the life of the warrior that she loved. The big chief granted it on one condition."

"And that condition?" cried Rupert, eagerly, as the savage paused. The sailor guessed it, and as he put the question he held the girl still closer to his breast.

"If the white flower would go to the captive's wigwam; say to him that she loved him no longer, and could never come and sing in his wigwam, the big chief would spare his life and he could go free. The white flower consented—the long-knife made her swear that she would not reveal to her brave the promise that she had given."

All now was clear to Rupert. He saw the subtle plan of the wily Spaniard. He saw, too, how truly and deeply Isabel loved him.

"Isabel," he said, softly, "this then is the reason why you have spoken so cruelly. To save my life you were willing to sacrifice your love. You are an angel of goodness. But now, Isabel, now that I know the truth you will not persevere in the course that this dark villain marked out for you. The truth is known to me. You are released from your vow. Know, too, Isabel, that even were I led out for execution, the muskets pointed at my breast, I would not accept life bought by such a sacrifice. The conditions under which you gave the pledge no longer exist. Then I was a helpless prisoner, no way to escape open to me, death certain, my life existing only on the slender thread of the commandante's will. All is changed now. Thanks to my friend here, escape is easy, and once free from these walls, safety awaits me. I can laugh to scorn the power of the commandante and all the Spaniards at his back."

"But I promised—" murmured Isabel.

"And your vow to me, does that count for nothing, dear one?" Rupert asked, softly. "Which will you break, the first vow or the last?"

"The last!" she replied, quickly.

"Joy then awaits me," said Rupert, his face beaming and his glance high.

"But, whither will you fly?" questioned the girl. "The moment your escape is discovered, they will follow you at once. The commandante has many soldiers and they will not hesitate to execute his orders, no matter how cruel they may be."

"Isabel, on the waters of yonder bay floats a gallant brigantine that calls me master; a hundred brave hearts man her deck, not one of whom but will cheerfully follow me, even unto death. You remember the bayou where we sought refuge the other night, when the soldiers, headed by this Captain Estevan, chased us down the bay; where we landed, got the horses, by means of which we were able to get back to the city before our pursuers?"

"Yes."

"My craft lies concealed in that bayou. There I will seek refuge; and, Isabel, will I ask too much, if I beg of you to go with me?"

"Did I not promise it?" she replied, question for question. No longer the tear-drops bedewed her cheeks; the radiant flush of joy once more shone upon her features.

"You will go then?"

"Yes."

"And we will depart and leave these shores forever."

"But, Rupert, one question."

"What is it?"

"The commandante tried to shake my faith in you. He told me that you were—I can not bear to utter the terrible words," she said, in confusion.

"He told you that I was Lafitte, the pirate?" the sailor said, calmly.

"Yes."

"And did you believe him?"

"No; he said that your hand was red with blood; your soul stained with crime. I could not believe it; to me you will ever be Rupert, the playmate of my childhood, the savior of my life, the man to whom I have given my love," replied Isabel, her eyes full of trust and love.

"Whether I am only Rupert, as you know me, or Lafitte, the 'Terror of the Gulf,' as the Spaniard says, I can freely swear to you that I am innocent of crime. True, men have fallen by my hand, the guns of my vessel have lowered many a flag on the high seas, but it was done in fair and open fight. Believe me, no act of mine in the past will disgrace the woman who is willing to trust her future life unto my care."

"I do believe your words, and give myself to you freely," the girl replied.

"When the white chief is ready, his red brother will lead the way," said the Indian.

"The white man will try to pay his brother for this service if it shall ever be in his power to do so!" exclaimed Rupert, earnestly.

"White flower go, too?" asked the Indian, as he moved to the trap-door, which was in the corner by the wall. He noticed that Rupert and the girl followed him.

"Yes; soon she will be my wife," Rupert replied.

"It is good," replied the Indian.

The chief lifted up the trap-door. The heavy deposit of dust, which had hid the line of the trap from view, proved how long it had been since the door had been used.

The three descended; the top closed and the prison cell was deserted.

The soldier on guard, Roque Vasca, waited a reasonable time for the return of the girl, and then he began to grow impatient.

"*Voto a brios!*" he muttered; "she's a long time, taking leave of this gallant. By the beard of my grandfather, there's no woman in the world that would take the trouble to come

and say 'good-by' to me, if I was as near the other world as this heretic is. I wonder who the commandante will give his clothes to? It's a brave jacket of velvet he has, with its silver buttons. I must make an early application to be the American's heir."

Then Roque commenced striding up and down the corridor, and wondering, as he walked, whether the doomed man had any gold-pieces about him.

"By the saints!" he cried, suddenly, "I'll ask him. Money is of no use to him where he's going. I might as well have it as any one else. What a deuced long time the senorita is taking for her adieu!"

Then the thought occurred to Roque that, perhaps, it would be as well to take a look into the room of the prisoner.

"Who knows?" he muttered; "she may have brought him a file or a saw—these women are up to all sorts of tricks—and he may be at work on the bars of the window. They're fine, strong ones, though. I'll look in; it can do no harm."

So Roque approached the door, opened it, and walked into the apartment. With horror-stricken eyes, he looked around.

The room was empty!

With a yell, like a wild beast, the soldier rushed to the window and tried the iron bars. Each bar was firm in its socket.

The rough, stubby hair of the soldier began, gradually, to rise in affright.

"The Virgin save us!" he cried, crossing himself in horror.

"They are both gone! Yet the window-bars are secure, and I have kept good watch outside. 'Tis the work of the Evil One. Satan himself aids this American. I felt sure he would get out. I must go to the commandante!" And, seizing the lantern, the soldier rushed, in terror, from the room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ADVANCE ON PENSACOLA.

BREATHLESS with haste, the soldier rushed into the quarters of Don Alvarado. There he found both the commandante and his son, Captain Estevan.

The two started in astonishment as Roque rushed into the room, his swarthy face pale with terror.

"Oh, senors!" he cried, "they have both gone to the devil—vanished in the air!"

"What do you mean, fool?" demanded the commandante, who instantly guessed from the strange excitement of the soldier that something unusual had happened.

Then Roque told what had occurred. How he had conducted the Senorita Isabel to the room of the prisoner as ordered; how he had left her there and withdrew; and then, at last, tired of waiting, he had re-entered the prisoner's cell to find it empty.

"Impossible!" cried the commandante, snatching up his saber, buckling it on, and preparing to go forth.

"Look for yourself, commandante!" exclaimed the soldier. "If I do not speak truth, may I never more eat bread."

The commandante, followed by Estevan and Roque, proceeded at once to the room which had been occupied by the prisoner.

Like the soldier, the commandante at once tested the strength of the window-bars.

"They're all right, senor!" cried Roque; "the heretic went up through the ceiling. He's a son of Satan, and the evil one always aids his own."

But the Spaniard was above vulgar superstition. Seizing the lantern, he proceeded to examine the walls.

"You are sure that they did not slip by you in the darkness of the entry?" the commandante asked.

"Yes; besides, I held my post at the angle where the light of the candle on the wall makes the darkness as bright as day; then the room beyond is filled with soldiers, as you yourself saw as we entered."

A cry from the commandante stopped the speech of the soldier. The officer was bending over the line of the trap-door that his keen eyes had detected in the floor.

"There is a trap-door here!" he cried.

"The dust has concealed it from sight," Estevan said, examining the door; "it has evidently not been used for years."

The Spaniard tried in vain to raise the door; it held firm in its place.

"Let me try the point of my knife on it, senor commandante!" cried Roque.

The soldier knelt by the trap, and by the aid of the knife-blade, forced it open. The trap open, disclosed a dark gulf underneath into which descended a rude ladder.

"There's a sort of cellar under here," said Roque, sticking his head down into the darkness.

"Something rare in this locality," Estevan remarked.

"I understand its purpose. This house is one of the oldest in the city. This is a covered way designed as a retreat for the garrison in case of an Indian attack," the commandante said.

"Shall we explore it?" Estevan asked.

"Yes," the father replied. "It puzzles me to guess how the American discovered its existence."

"Perhaps it was known to Isabel," Estevan suggested. "One of the old black crones may have known of it."

"'Tis possible; come!" Taking the lantern with him, the commandante descended the ladder. Estevan followed, but Roque hesitated on the brink of the gloomy opening.

"This may lead to the infernal regions," he muttered to

himself, in superstitious horror. "Well, I'll go in good company, anyway!" and, acting on that thought, he followed the others.

The three found themselves in a narrow passage, just high enough for them to stand in without touching their heads, and wide enough for two to walk abreast. The commandante led the way with the lantern; the other two followed in his footsteps. For full ten minutes they followed the dark way; then their progress was barred by a ladder, like the one they had descended; beyond the ladder a wall of earth closed in the passage.

By the aid of the lantern, the commandante discovered that a trap-door existed above the ladder. Opening the door, the three ascended, and found themselves in a small shed used as a wood-house.

"I understand now," said the aged officer, after glancing around him. "Another barrack like the one which we have just left once stood on this spot. The passage was dug at the time of the early Indian wars to connect the two, so that, in case of an attack, if the defenders of one were hard pressed by the savages, they could either retreat to the other, or be reinforced by its garrison."

"One thing is certain," said Estevan, moodily; "our prey has escaped us, and taken the girl with him, too."

"They cannot have proceeded far. We will proceed to search for them at once."

The three left the shed and hastened to the barracks occupied by the soldiers. Hardly had they reached their destination, when a horseman dashed into the yard. The sides of the steed were white with lather, and his heaving flanks told of headlong speed.

The rider recognized the Spanish officer, and almost tumbled out of his saddle in his haste to dismount.

"Oh, senor!" the man cried, breathlessly.

The Spaniard recognized the exhausted rider. He was the proprietor of a plantation on the Perdita.

"Well, senor?" demanded the commandante, unable to guess the cause of the alarm of the stranger.

"The Americans!" the horseman gasped.

"Ah!" The commandante started. He scented danger in the air.

"On the march hither—an army, senor—horse, foot and artillery!" continued the man, in breathless haste.

"On the march hither?" questioned the officer, in amazement.

"Yes, senor, under General Jackson. The forces come from New Orleans, and they are marching straight for Pensacola. They crossed the river and encamped on my plantation. I learned the object of the expedition and took horse at once to warn you."

"Thanks, senor; you have performed a great service," said the commandante, courteously. "Roque, see that the senor and his horse are both attended to. Excuse me, senor; I must attend to this matter."

The commandante and his son proceeded at once to the quarters of the former.

"What is the meaning of this movement on the part of the Americans, father?" asked Estevan.

"I have expected an attack for some time," the commandante replied, thoughtfully. "You remember the British man-of-war that put into our port and landed the agents who sought to stir up the Indians, and induce them to take sides against the Americans?"

"The Shannon? Yes."

"By some means, I know not how, the news of that affair reached General Jackson, who commands the American forces at New Orleans. Through my spies in that city, I have been informed that the American general threatened to attack Pensacola, claiming that we have forfeited our right to be classed as neutrals by affording aid and succor to the English."

"A war, then, is upon us?"

"Yes, and we are ill-prepared to meet it," the commandante said, thoughtfully. "We have but three hundred men in the garrison, and our artillery is almost worthless."

"But it cannot be possible that the American general leads his whole force against us. That would leave New Orleans unguarded, and the English commanders have been threatening to attack the city for some time."

"It is probably only a division of cavalry, although our messenger spoke of artillery," the commandante said.

"We must not place too great a reliance upon his words; he is evidently thoroughly frightened."

"If it is only a cavalry squadron, we can laugh at them from behind the walls of the fort. And, even if they have artillery, it cannot consist of anything but light field-pieces."

"Worth but little against our ramparts," Estevan said.

"True; and I do not think that the Americans will attempt to storm the fort. With three hundred men, and our artillery, bad as it is, we can hold it against two thousand soldiers, unless they are provided with siege guns, to batter down our walls."

"We'll fight them to the last, then?"

"We have no other course open to us. It is useless to deny the truth, when the truth is known—we have aided the English in their war upon the Americans. We must meet the consequences, let them be what they may," said Don Carlos.

By this time the two had reached the house of the commandante. A man habited as a fisherman hastily approached them. It was the Spaniard called Pablo, who figured in the opening chapter of our story.

The fisherman doffed his cap respectfully as he approached the two officers.

"Pardon, seniors," he said, "but I have something to tell you that perhaps you would like to hear."

"What is it?" asked the commandante, a touch of impatience in his voice.

"The Senorita Isabel—"

"Ah!" cried both the Spaniards, in a breath. They were all attention now.

"As I sat by my boat on the beach, a strange senior came up to me and asked me for the loan of my boat for a sail. As he offered me a gold-piece, I readily consented. He got in and sailed off a little way, then returned and landed on the beach nearer to the city. From behind my hut I watched him. The Senorita Isabel came down to the beach, got into the boat, and then they put to sea. I watched, until I lost them in the gloom of the night. Then I suddenly thought that, perhaps, something was wrong, and that it would be as well that you should know what the senorita had done as to be in ignorance of it—so I thought I'd come and tell you what I have seen."

"You are an honest fellow!" cried Estevan, quickly; "here is a gold-piece for your pains."

With many a bow the fisherman withdrew.

"What is to be done, father?"

"I do not know," replied the commandante, a strange expression upon his face.

"'Twas the American, of course, who took the boat. I know the haunt that he is making for with his prize. I chased him there the other night, but, by some devilish jugglery, he raised an awful form from out the dark waters, and froze the courage of my men. Do you not see the game of this fellow? It is probable that he has a score or more of his pirates secreted in the woods that fringe this lagoon—his lurking place. He will wait there till Jackson advances; then, under the protection of the soldiers, Isabel is lost to us forever."

"What do you propose to do?" asked the perplexed commandante.

"Give me fifty of our men. I will take the coasting schooner that now lies in port, mount a piece of artillery on her, proceed to this bayou, and hunt these reptiles from their holes. I'll attack them early in the morning."

"Be it so—you shall have the soldiers; but, as you value your soul, do not harm this Rupert," said the commandante, solemnly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MESSENGER.

UNDER the trees crowning the bluff that frowned on the dark waters, where Bayou Achée leaped into the embrace of the bay, stood the Yankee, Andrews, and a stalwart stranger, clad in a sailor's garb. By the side of this sailor hung a cutlass, and a heavy pistol was thrust through his belt.

Andrews had just dismounted from a horse, whose heaving sides told that he had been ridden hard.

"Where's the captain?" asked the sailor, who answered to the name of Will Edwards.

"Up yonder in Pensacola," replied Andrews, a gloomy look upon his shrewd face.

"Why didn't he come with you?"

"For the best of all reasons, he couldn't. He's a prisoner in the hands of the Spaniards."

"A prisoner?" exclaimed Edwards, in astonishment.

"Yes."

"What is to be done?"

"At present, nothing," Andrews replied. "When the dons captivated the cap'n, I managed to escape. There's an old Injun chief mixed up in the affair. He promised me that he would free the cap'n. The old red-skin seems to know all about us and our expedition. With the Injun I scouted around the shanty where they've got the cap'n locked up. Then the chief told me to wait at a certain spot with two horses for an hour; if he and the cap'n didn't come within that time to mount one of the horses, ride down and get fifty men ready. Then to wait here until I heard from him."

"I suppose the idea is to make a sudden dash, carry off our cap'n and then retreat."

"Yes; but it was hard work to make out what the red-skin did mean. He don't say much, and what he does say is awful mixed up."

"I don't like this land business, for my part," said Edwards, thoughtfully; "the sea is our element."

"It can't be helped. If we should run the brigantine up, the dons might put the cap'n out of the way. Our only hope is to make a sudden dash and surprise 'em. You may as well get the brigantine ready for sea, though; there's no telling what will happen in the next twenty-four hours. I've a notion that there's fun ahead."

"So much the better!" cried the sailor, rubbing his hands together, gleefully. "I'm getting tired of skulking down here in the bushes. The boys are spoiling for a fight, and they wouldn't like any thing better than a brush with the dons."

"They'll have all the fighting they want pretty soon, or I miss my reckoning," Andrews replied.

Then a sailor approached, conducting a horseman. The two came directly up to Andrews.

"A messenger for the captain," said the sailor.

"I wish to see Captain Vane instantly," said the horseman, who was a little, stoutly-built man, dressed roughly. Both man and steed were covered with dust, and showed the traces of a long journey and hard riding.

"I'm afraid that you can not see the captain at present," Andrews replied.

"But my business is of the utmost importance," urged the messenger. "I am the bearer of dispatches from General Jackson."

"I am sorry, but the captain at present is in Pensacola, and although I expect him every moment, yet circumstances may detain him there for some time."

"I understand," said the messenger; "he is noting the weak points of the enemy. A service of danger and one that suits well with the captain's daring spirit."

"I am second in command, Lieutenant Andrews; are your instructions to deliver the dispatches into the captain's own hands?" the Yankee asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the messenger; "they must be of great importance, as the general's orders were to spare neither myself nor horse, but ride as if I rode for life, and to be sure and deliver the dispatches into no other hands but those of the captain."

"Well, you will have to wait, then," Andrews said. "I expect either the captain or a messenger from him every moment. Where is General Jackson now?"

"He was to encamp to-night on the Perdita river."

"He is on the march then for Pensacola?" Andrews said, in surprise.

"Yes; at the head of quite a large force."

"I can understand now; we are, probably, to co-operate with the land forces in an attack on the city."

"I should not be surprised," replied the messenger.

A sailor with a night-glass in his hand approached the little group, coming from the sea side of the bluff.

"Lieutenant, a small boat is in the bay, making for the bayou."

"A small boat?"

"Looks like one of those fishing smacks," the sailor added.

"Get the light ready then; we'll have to start the whale out arter 'em. The demon will frighten them away. You look after that, Edwards," said Andrews.

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the sailor, Edwards, and he hastened away; going, not toward the sea, but landward to the bayou.

"I'll take a look at the critter, myself," said Andrews. "If you come with me, sir, I'll show you a clever Yankee trick that has just frightened the life out of the bay fishermen." He spoke to Jackson's messenger.

"I shall be pleased," the messenger replied.

"And, Tom," Andrews addressed the sailor who had brought the intelligence of the boat's approach, "give 'em the light as strong as you can."

"Oh, never fear, sir!" cried the sailor, laughing; "I'll do it up brown."

The sailor retraced his steps to his lookout on the summit of the bluff. Andrews and the horseman, who had dismounted and tied his horse to a tree, followed.

From the summit of the hill they commanded a full view of the bay, although the darkness of the night—the moon was obscured by a heavy cloud—limited the extent of their vision.

Afar off on the dark waters, but approaching each minute nearer and nearer to the entrance to the bayou, was the white sail of the little boat.

Steadily on came the light craft, dancing like a thing of life on the white-capped billows of the bay. Straight she steered for the dark mouth of the bayou. A sailor's hand was evidently at the helm.

"They intend to run into the bayou, confound 'em!" Andrews cried, annoyed, as she watched the progress of the craft.

"They will discover your presence here then," the messenger said.

"Yes, if they don't see something to make them get out of the bayou quicker than they came in," Andrews replied.

"Why, what should they see?" asked the messenger, in astonishment.

"The most awful sight that a man's eyes ever looked upon," Andrews replied. "There's a demon form—a water devil—in the shape of a Winged Whale—that haunts the bayou and is certain death to strangers, particularly Spaniards. Wait till yon little craft enters the channel here and you'll see a sight that will make your hair stand on end."

The messenger listened to the strange words of the sailor with wonder.

"You are joking with me," he said, at last.

"Am I? Well, you jest wait and see," Andrews replied, with never a smile on his weatherbeaten features. "If it don't frighten you out of a year's growth, you can call me a stick-in-the-mud."

"Such a thing as a Winged Whale never existed."

"In natur', no; but this awful critter is out of all natur'. Don't I tell you it's a demon, ready to swallow folks alive, only it never gets the chance, as none of the dons seem anxious to cultivate its acquaintance. They sail into the inlet as bold as thunder, but the way they get out of it when the Winged Whale comes beats all possessed."

The incredulous look upon the face of the messenger told plainly that he thought the shrewd Down-easter was playing a joke upon him.

"When I see the Winged Whale, I'll believe that it exists," he said, doubtfully.

"Well, you are jest the most awful feller to convince that I ever *did* hear tell on," said Andrews, a shrewd smile creeping over his face. Then he noted the position of the boat. It had entered the channel that led to the bayou.

"Keep your eyes about there," and as he spoke, the Yankee pointed to the bayou, north-west of where they stood. "In less than a minute you'll see it. If you have got any prayers to say, I guess you had better get 'em ready."

And as the messenger looked in the direction indicated by the outstretched arm of Andrews, to his utter astonishment he beheld a peculiar bright light floating on the surface of the water. Ere he could express his amazement, a dark form appeared in the center of the light; it was a huge sea-monster with wide outstretched wings, eyes that shone like balls of fire, and a mouth which vomited forth flames.

For a little minute only the awe-struck eyes of the messenger looked upon the terrible monster, for, over the surface of the water, came the clear hail:

"Winged Whale, ahoy!"

As if by magic, at the sound the monster and mystic light disappeared; all again was darkness. The messenger rubbed his eyes to convince himself that he had not been dreaming.

Andrews had listened attentively to the hail. A smile of delight came over his face at the sound.

"It's the cap'n, by jingo!" he cried.

"The captain?" said the messenger, not yet recovered from the effect of the strange sight that he had seen.

"Yes; I'd swear to his voice among a thousand," Andrews replied. "He has managed to escape from the dons. Come, let us go to the beach!"

Andrews and the messenger hurried down. But, by the time they reached the beach, the boat already had made a landing. Rupert and Isabel stood on the beach, surrounded by a dozen stalwart sailors, who gladly welcomed their leader.

Isabel, leaning on Rupert's arm, looked around in astonishment.

"Are these men the dreaded pirates of Lafitte?" she asked herself, as she gazed upon the manly faces of the seamen.

"Welcome, cap'n!" cried Andrews, in glee. "Here's a messenger from the general with important dispatches."

Rupert tore open the dispatches eagerly, and by the light of a torch which one of the sailors carried, scanned their contents.

"The time for action, lads, has come!" he cried, in joy. "Andrews, see that every thing is put in readiness to sail by daylight. By noon, to-morrow, I'll have ample vengeance for all the wrong that they have done me in yonder city."

"That's the talk! Hurrah for action!" cried Andrews, in delight, and a sturdy cheer went merrily up on the night breeze and woke the echoes of the bayou as it died away, far in the distance.

"You shall take possession of my cabin, Isabel," he said, in an undertone to the girl, "until we reach New Orleans. There a minister will make you mine forever."

"Your cabin?" said Isabel, in astonishment.

"Yes; I have a surprise in store for you," he said, smiling. "Soon you shall stand on the deck of my ocean kingdom."

Just as the first gray streaks of the morning light began to line the eastern skies, the old Indian chief woke Rupert from his slumber with the intelligence that the Spaniards would attack him by daylight, from the sea!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ATTACK.

THE morning sun was some hours old in the heavens when the coasting schooner that bore Captain Estevan and his men arrived off the mouth of the bayou.

All within the inlet was still; no sound or sign gave evidence of the presence of a foe.

Estevan stood on deck, Lieutenant Cadova by his side. At the helm, guiding the course of the schooner, stood the fisherman, Pablo, who had been employed as pilot.

"Can you take the schooner into the bayou?" asked Estevan, surveying the narrow passage with an expression of doubt upon his features.

"Oh, yes, senor," the fisherman replied, quickly; "there is water enough there to float a frigate."

"Is there not danger of an ambuscade?" asked Cadova, glancing anxiously at the wooded banks of the inlet. "As we pass through, a raking fire of musketry would tell terribly upon our crowded deck."

"It is not likely that this fellow has more than half a dozen men with him," Estevan replied, scornfully. "I do not think that they will dare to attempt to fight us," and Estevan glanced proudly at the warlike array that surrounded him. "So run the schooner into the bayou, pilot."

Pablo obeyed the order. Obedient to the helm, the craft forged through the narrow inlet and entered upon the bay beyond. As she swung round the point into the bayou, a huge dark form, lying motionless upon the surface of the water in one of the little inlets that dented the shores of the bayou, met the eyes of the Spaniards.

Roque, who formed one of the party, recognized it at once.

"It is the water demon, as weep," he cried, in horror.

The soldier was right; the huge form that slept so quietly upon the surface of the tide was indeed the Winged Whale. Its great wings were extended in the air as if it meditated flight into the upper region. The great eyes no longer shone like balls of fire; indeed, they looked as if the eyes themselves had been torn from their socket. The huge jaws were shut, and no longer poured forth the breath of fire.

The Spaniards crowded to the side of the vessel to look upon the terrible form of which they had heard so much, for Roque, and the other soldiers who had been his companions on the night when they had encountered the water demon, had told of the terrible figure, and had not hesitated to embellish their story somewhat.

"Try a shot on yonder thing!" cried Estevan; "we'll see if it is proof against powder and ball!"

In the broad glare of the daylight, the Winged Whale did not inspire such terror as when the dark mantle of night was on land and sea.

The light brass-piece that Estevan had mounted on the schooner was trained upon the monster. The match was applied, the white puff of smoke poured forth, and the round shot sped on its way.

The aim of the Spaniard was true; the ball struck the monster just at the water line. The awful form quivered for a moment, then reeled convulsively on its side, sunk half way down in the water, and then remained motionless.

The Spaniards looked on in astonishment.

"By the Virgin! the demon died easy!" exclaimed Roque, who had expected to see the round shot recoil from the form of the terrible thing as though it had stricken a stone-wall.

"There is some trick in this!" exclaimed Estevan. "Pilot, head the craft for yonder thing; we'll see what it is."

The pilot obeyed the order, and the schooner soon drew near to the huge water demon.

Curses loud and deep broke from the lips of the Spaniards when they discovered what the Winged Whale really was.

They saw that they had been the victims of a shrewd Yankee trick. The water demon was but a monster curiously constructed of wood and canvas, painted to resemble a huge fish, and mounted upon a boat.

Estevan understood at once how, in the night, emerging from the darkness into the light, the figure seemed to rise from the water.

"But the strange circle of light, senor captain?" cried Roque, who was unwilling to give up his belief in the supernatural character of the monster.

"Thrown by a powerful reflector from the bank of the bayou!" Estevan said, in anger. "I can not understand how the cursed trick duped me as it did."

But, even as the Spanish captain spoke, a new incident called his attention and forbade any further notice being taken of Andrews' clever device for frightening the Spanish fishermen out of the bayou.

Round a point in the upper part of the land-locked bay, that concealed it from sight, came a savey brigantine. The beautiful water lines, the sharp bow, the rake of the masts, and the enormous spread of canvas, told that the new-comer was an American clipper.

Up went a pure white flag to the peak, and, as it fluttered out in the breeze, the Spaniards saw that it bore the figure of a *Winged Whale*!

The rage of Estevan knew no bounds. He saw that he was in a trap from whence there was no escape.

The Winged Whale, for so the savey brigantine was named, bore down directly upon the schooner.

There was but one means of escape—the boat of the schooner. Hastily Estevan gave the order:

"Lower the boat!"

Hardly had it touched the water, when the Spaniards poured into it, pell-mell; it upset, and the soldiers were plunged into the water.

Estevan was choking in the embrace of the tide. Vainly he struggled; unable to swim, death alone awaited him.

"Help! save me!" he cried.

But in that hour of peril, the life of the captain was worth no more than that of the common soldier. Some of the men, luckily, clung to the boat, but Estevan, drifting slowly away, carried on by the tide, was past mortal help. He beat the water vainly with his hands, shrieked in agony for aid, struggled feebly, and then the dark waves closed over his head, and Estevan, the Spanish captain, sunk, to rise no more.

The waters of the bayou settled the debt of vengeance owed by the Spaniard to Red Rupert.

"Do you surrender?" cried the shrill voice of Andrews, as he laid the brigantine alongside the schooner.

"Yes, senor," replied the lieutenant, Cadova.

Rupert, with a score of men, boarded the schooner.

"Where is Captain Estevan?" the sailor asked, as his eyes rapidly glanced along the deck in search of the Spaniard.

"Yonder, beneath the waves," replied the Spaniard. "He attempted to escape, but the boat upset, and he was drowned."

For a moment Rupert was silent. He had come prepared to meet a foe, for the first time placed by fortune at his mercy, but death had robbed him of his victory.

"I am sorry for his death, although he was my foe," the sailor said, slowly. "I should have made him my prisoner, but his life would have been safe in my hands. Heaven is my witness that I did not wish to take his life, although he assailed mine more than once. But that is all over now. The grave ends all hatreds."

"What is your pleasure, senor, respecting myself and men?" the officer asked.

"Let your men give up their weapons and retire below. I shall put a prize crew on board. Your final disposition will rest with General Jackson, into whose charge I shall commit you, when he arrives," Rupert replied.

"This loss will be a sad blow to the commandante," said the Spanish officer, regretfully. "If, as I hear, it is the intention of General Jackson to attack Pensacola, I presume that you are acting in concert with him?"

"Yes, senor," Rupert replied; "yonder craft is the American privateer, the 'Winged Whale,' which I have the honor to command. I shall proceed at once to Pensacola and attack the fort, unless your commandante has the wisdom to surrender."

Soon the Spaniards were disarmed and placed below the hatches. One of the petty officers of the privateer, with some twenty men, was placed in charge of the prize, and then the brigantine, passing through the narrow inlet into the broad waters of the bay, turned her sharp bow northward, toward the doomed city of Pensacola.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CAPTURE.

WITH an anxious brow the commandante, Don Alvarado, paced the ramparts of the fort. Messenger after messenger had brought news of the near approach of the American army.

The Spanish commander had made all possible preparation for the attack, but, as he looked upon the little body of soldiers that composed his army, he fully realized that resistance was almost hopeless.

Many an anxious glance he cast seaward. He looked for the white sails of the coasting schooner, but saw them not. Then, as he looked toward the land, he beheld the advance guard of the American army.

Slowly the troops came on, until, at last, the lines of the besiegers, extending from beach to beach in a half-circle, completely surrounded the fort.

The American lines were just beyond the range of the fire from the fort.

A bitter smile came over the swarthy face of the Spaniard as he surveyed the foe through a field-glass and noted they had no artillery.

"Without cannon they cannot batter down my walls, and I'll hold the fort while a soldier remains," he muttered, as his gaze rested on the dark line that encircled the fortification. "My guns will play havoc with them as they move over the level plain to the assault. What can detain Estevan?"

And as he asked the question, again he looked seaward. This time the white sails of a vessel met his eyes, beating up the bay. But a single glance told him that it was not the coasting schooner that he looked upon.

A strange foreboding of evil crept over him.

"That is not the schooner," he said, in alarm; "it is a brigantine. Perhaps an English cruiser?" and his face brightened up at the thought. "By the saints! if it should be an Englishman, perhaps I may be able to give these Americans a lesson."

Then he leveled the glass at the strange craft.

"Her decks are full of men, and I can see the glitter of a brass piece amidships," he murmured. "She flies no flag at her peak, and comes steadily on as if well acquainted with the harbor."

Long and carefully the Spaniard examined the stranger through the glass; a conviction forced itself into his mind, despite the pain the thought gave him.

"It is an American!" he muttered, in despair.

And then, as if in answer to his words, a flag was run up, and, as it lazily unfolded itself in the breeze, the banner of the Republic, the "Stars and Stripes," was displayed.

"Resistance is useless!" the commandante cried, in despair; "all my guns are *en barbette*. That brass piece amidships is probably an eighteen-pounder, whose range is far greater than any of my own. He can lay off beyond the line of our fire and dismount my pieces one by one."

Then an officer, bearing a white flag, galloped forth from the line of the besieging army and approached the fort.

The American cruiser rounded to, let go her anchors, clewed up her sails, and opened her ports in warlike array.

The officer halted a short distance from the fort.

The commandante approached the edge of the rampart.

"Your business, senor?" the Spaniard asked.

"To see the commanding officer of this post."

"Why does the American general attack the city of a nation with which his republic is at peace?" demanded the commandante.

"I am not here, senor, to discuss political questions, but warlike ones," replied the officer, curtly. "I am instructed by General Jackson to inform you that, if you decline to surrender, our forces will open fire at once."

"Return to your commander; tell him that, in order to save the effusion of blood, I will surrender, but I protest against this unwarrantable outrage upon a neutral power," said the commandante, gravely.

The American officer simply bowed in reply, wheeled his horse and galloped back to the lines of his army.

With a sigh, Don Alvarado gave the order to lower the Spanish standard. Down came the proud banner of haughty Spain, and, as it slowly descended, another flag floated on the air from the privateer. It bore the symbol of a *Winged Whale*.

The commandante turned deathly pale as his eyes rested upon the strange emblem.

"The hand of fate is in this," he murmured. "Am I to be punished now for my early crime? The cup that fate has of late placed to my lips has been bitter indeed. Is it fated that I must drain it even to the bitter dregs?"

With a slow step the Spaniard descended from the ramparts to receive the victors.

The shades of night are once more falling over Pensacola.

In the little room of the inn where we have before visited her, Nanon sits.

The face of the beautiful girl is paler than it was wont to be. The heavy blue lines around her eyes tell of tears and of suffering. She looks five years older than she did when first she sought Pensacola, but a few days ago, in search of the man to whom she had given the love of her girlish heart.

The single candle burning on the table shed its faint light over the wan face of the suffering girl. The great tears were in her eyes as she thought of how wretched her fate had been.

The door opened suddenly and Baptiste entered. There was a strange look upon his stern features.

Nanon rose, her hands extended in anxiety.

"Estevan!" she cried. One thought only was in her heart—her lover.

"Sit down, Nanon," the Frenchman said, gently, a tender expression in his hoarse voice.

"You bring me bad news!" Nanon cried, her quick, womanly instincts reading the truth in the face of the man.

"Can you bear it?" he asked.

"Yes; anything is better than this suspense," she cried.

"Well, he is dead."

With a smothered cry, Nanon pressed her hands to her temples, and then fell heavily to the floor.

Baptiste knelt by her, in alarm.

"Oh, cursed idiot that I am!" he cried; "I have killed her! Mon Dieu! she must recover; she must live to forget this Spanish scoundrel, who was not worthy the love of such a woman as this girl is. I'd give ten years of my life if she would only love me half as well."

Under the tender care of Baptiste, the girl soon recovered. A look of despair was on her face, but she listened calmly as Baptiste told the story of Estevan's death, all the particulars of which he had learned from one of the men of the privateer, who had been one of the boarding-party that followed Rupert to the deck of the schooner.

"And my father?" she questioned.

"It is all a lie; Lafitte is not in Pensacola. The man they arrested as Lafitte was this young sailor, Red Rupert, the captain of the Yankee privateer, the *Winged Whale*. I saw his vessel when she lay off New Orleans. The commandante denounced him as Lafitte that he might remove him from his son's way. And now, listen to another truth, Nanon; you are not the daughter of the pirate; I told you the story that the stigma of your birth might separate you from this Spaniard, who was unworthy of your love, and has played you false from the first. You are the daughter of an old shipmate of mine; he died and consigned you to my care. By a lucky streak of fortune I was enabled to leave the sea and I devoted myself to you. I tell you frankly I have deceived you, for Antoine Baptiste will be honest with you. I have learned to love the child that I have watched over since infancy. Let that love be my excuse."

"Baptiste, you have been a brother to me," Nanon said, slowly, taking the rough hand of the sailor between her own white palms; "can I ever pay you for all you have done for me?"

"Yes," cried the Frenchman, dropping on his knee by her side, encircling her waist with his arm and gazing up with eyes full of tender passion into her face.

"How?" she asked, looking into the earnest face of the man who knelt by her side.

"Let me be ever by your side, ready to guard you against all the evils of this world. I do not ask you to love me; let me still be your brother."

"Baptiste, I can only repay you in one way," she said, slowly and softly; "you shall be my husband. Give me one year to forget the man who now lies beneath the sea, and then I am yours forever."

Gently the sailor kissed the white brow of the girl. From that hour their paths in life ran side by side. In time, Nanon forgot.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MYSTERY REVEALED.

WITHIN the room of the commandante, Don Alvarado, stood a group of three. The light from the burning candles fell upon anxious faces.

The commandante was leaning upon the chair from which

he had risen at the entrance of his visitors. The Spanish commandante had been released on parole.

By the door stood the young sailor, Red Rupert, and by his side, his promised bride, the fair Isabel.

Through the open window could be seen the groups of palmetto trees, their leaves shining silver in the moonbeams.

The features of the Spaniard showed traces of deep emotion. Dark lines of care seamed the face, and despair cast its cloud over his brow.

"Pardon our intrusion, senor," Rupert said.

"You do not intrude; you are welcome, senor, and you, too, my daughter, for I feel that you are still my ward, although you have sought the protection of another," said the commandante, with stately courtesy.

"Forgive me!" and Isabel passed rapidly to the side of the old Spaniard and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "I could not help the love that is in my heart."

"You are not to blame, poor child," the Spaniard said, affectionately. "I must blame myself, and one who has now gone far from earthly judgment. Freely I give you to the man you love, if my poor consent will make you one whit the happier. Senor," and he turned to the sailor, "I have wronged you; I own it frankly, and I ask your pardon. But, one thing I swear to you: I never sought your life. When I caused you to be arrested as the pirate Lafitte, it was to prevent you from killing my son, Estevan, or he from killing you. I saw that there would be murder done if you were both at liberty."

"I believe you, senor," Rupert replied. "And now, I have a favor to ask at your hands."

"A favor from me?" asked the Spaniard, with a searching glance into Rupert's face, as he spoke.

"Yes; listen to me. Some years ago there lived in this city of Pensacola a boy whose birth and parentage were a mystery. He was brought up by an old fisherman. When he was fourteen years of age he dared to forget that he was almost a slave—for the red blood of the Indian mingled with the white drops in his veins, and all, save one, looked upon him as being little better than the black. He committed what was called a crime by the Spaniards. The lash repaid his fault. Smarting with shame he fled from the scene of his disgrace and vowed that he would never return until he had won a name, that even the proudest Spaniard would not dare to scoff at. Time passed on; the boy became a man; little by little, he fought his way upward, cheered by one hope alone. From the fore-castle he gained the quarter-deck. He won the commission of captain in the naval service of the United States. Then he returned to Pensacola, two objects in his mind; first, to win the girl whose face had been ever with him amid all his toils and dangers; second to unravel the mystery that surrounded his birth. I am the man whose career from the fisherman's boy to the American captain I have traced. And now, senor commandante, I ask you, do you know aught of my parents?"

"Why do you put such a question to me?" the Spaniard asked, slowly, his gaze half-averted from the face of the sailor.

"Because your features are familiar to me; they recall memories of my childhood—of troops of dark-hued warriors standing round me; the red chiefs of the forest. I feel a presentiment that, in some way, you are connected with my early life," Rupert replied.

For a moment there was silence in the room. The commandante seemed struggling with many emotions. At last:

"Senor," he said, "if I speak, my words will revive painful memories that, for long years, I have striven to forget; but I will reveal all that I know. Years ago, a young brother of a noble house in old Spain killed an opponent in a duel. The slain man was the son of one of the high officers of the government. The young man was obliged to fly for his life. In order to evade pursuit he enlisted as a common soldier in a battalion of foot, *en route* for the New World. He came here to Pensacola. Again his fiery temper led him astray. Another victim fell by his sword, and, hunted like the wolf, he fled to the shelter of the forest and sought refuge with the Indians of the Appalachee tribe. Chance favored him here. The great medicine-man of the tribe was a white sailor who had been shipwrecked on the coast. The savages saved his

life, and he, being without kith or kin in the world, became one of them. Naturally shrewd, the sailor soon persuaded the untutored red-men that he was possessed of superhuman powers. On his breast was graven a strange device—sailor-fashion—which he declared was the totem of the Great Spirit. The mark was a huge Winged Whale. The Indians called him 'The man-with-the-flying-fish,' and revered him as an agent of the Great Spirit.

"In the white Indian, the Spanish soldier found a friend. Then again fortune favored him; a beautiful young girl, the flower of the Appalachee nation, loved the white stranger, became his wife. A son was born to the soldier. The medicine-man charmed it from all danger by placing on its baby breast a Winged Whale, like unto the mark he bore.

"Two years only the soldier lived with the tribe, for then a Spaniard sought him in the forest with strange news from Spain. The soldier's elder brother had died; the attain against him had been removed, and wealth and honor waited for him in Spain. He deserted his wife and babe and returned to his native land."

"I then am the child of this soldier, for I bear upon my breast the mark of a Winged Whale!" exclaimed Rupert.

"But my father?" he asked; "his name, and does he live?"

"He was called Steel-arm, and he is dead," replied the commandante, slowly.

"The white man lies!" said a deep, guttural voice, and through the open window the old Indian chief bounded, nimbly, into the room.

The commandante started in terror, and his face became deadly pale.

"O-tee-hee was once a great chief of the Appalachee nation; he was the brother of Lupah, the flower of the tribe. He gave her to the false white man who ran back to his wigwams across the big salt lake. The red squaw died—her heart shattered as the forked lightning shatters the oak. The red chief took the child of the false white man and gave it to the dwellers in the big wigwams here. He said he would kill the white chief when he met him, but now he spits at him in contempt. Young brave, you are the child of Lupah; there stands your father!"

With outstretched finger, the chief pointed to the commandante, who sunk speechless into a chair. Rupert and Isabel looked on in amazement, hardly able to believe their hearing.

A moment the Indian looked at the Spaniard cowering beneath the fire of his eyes, and then he bounded through the window and disappeared.

"Heaven forgive me for the crime I have committed!" cried the Spaniard, wildly. "The Indian has spoken the truth, I am thy father; Estevan was thy half-brother. I strove to do all in my power to keep you from injuring each other. I favored him, I know, for he, though the youngest born, was dearer to my heart than you, the child that I deserted in infancy. Rupert, can you forgive your guilty father?" The commandante, rising, approached the soldier with outstretched hands.

As the Spaniard stood in the center of the room, something whizzed through the window. With a hollow groan, the commandante fell forward on his face, an Indian arrow driven through his body.

The commandante strove to speak, but the blood gushed from his mouth and choked his utterance. A moment more and the Spaniard had gone to his long home.

The Appalachee chief had kept his vow.

History tells us how Spain finally relinquished Pensacola to the United States.

Rupert and Isabel were married. In their New England home they forgot the dangers of the past.

Honest Decius Andrews, in the town of Salem, became the happy possessor of a buxom Yankee wife; and, in the course of years, a half-dozen tow-headed olive-branches played around his knee. In the long winter nights he opens their blue eyes with wonder, as he tells them of the terrible water-demon that a shrewd Yankee skipper constructed in a far-off Southern bayou, and how the armed foe fled in terror from the awful monster, the Winged Whale.

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